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# THE WORLD'S BEST ONE HUNDRED DETECTIVE STORIES

VOLUME ONE

PARTS ONE AND TWO

# THE WORLD'S BEST ONE HUNDRED DETECTIVE STORIES

FIVE VOLUMES

EUGENE THWING
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

VOLUME ONE

PART ONE

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# INTRODUCTION

WHAT constitutes "the best one hundred detective stories" can never be decided beyond challenge. It will always be relative to the times, the tastes of the readers, and the popularity of the authors.

The detective story has developed as many types as other fiction. Ask each of four readers to choose the best novel among four, by Zane Gray, Rafael Sabatini, Joseph C. Lincoln, and Kathleen Norris, and altho each reader may make a different choice all will be equally correct because they represent genuine preferences of type.

Formerly the detective story was almost exclusively a problem in analytical deduction. Clues were minutely examined, elaborately discussed, and critically compared. These arguments filled page after page. Detail was piled upon detail, and the clues relevant to the crime were hopelessly mixed with those calculated to lead the reader astray. Dramatic action was largely absent. The detective story did not become widely popular in this form, and Poe, who is regarded as the originator of the modern detective tale, abandoned the field after his three Dupin stories, which are still reverently cherished by Poe lovers.

The universal vogue of the detective story as a recognized type of fiction may be said to have begun in the United States with Anna Katharine Green's "The Leavenworth Case," in England with A. Conan Doyle's famous Sherlock Holmes, and in France with Gaboriau's police tales. Rapid development followed, and as the writers and readers have increased in number, the style of the detective story has broadened and new types have become popular. To-day a collection of one hundred stories, all patterned after the so-called canonical type, would satisfy only a small fraction of the wide circle of detective-story fans.

Lovers of purely analytical deduction scorn the story that substitutes exciting adventure or melodrama. Those

who insist upon the presence of external clues minutely observed and correctly interpreted have scant patience with the detectives who depend upon intuition, mind-reading, or pseudo-scientific methods of discovery. More and more, however, the newer converts to detective stories are demanding thrills and swift action as well as mystery. Willard Huntington Wright, the well-known editor, literary critic, and expert on detective fiction, calls even the Sherlock Holmes stories "obsolescent," and says that the long analytical arguments of Poe's detective stories "act only as irritating encumbrances to the modern reader of detective fiction."

Thus "the best" of former years are no longer regarded as the best by the majority of readers to-day. "The best usually means to each reader the ones he likes best.

The attempt has been made more than once to fix a standard pattern for the modern detective story. But it can not be done. S. S. Van Dine, for example, declares that "for the writing of detective stories there are very definite laws—unwritten, perhaps, but none the less binding; and every respectable and self-respecting concocter of literary mysteries lives up to them." Forthwith he proceeds to formulate these laws in numerical order, and then to violate at least seven of them in his own stories. No writer of vigor and originality who understands the tastes and demands of his public can be chained to any other man's formula. He will create his problems, his interesting situations, and his thrills in his own way, according to his skill or inspiration, and the degree of his popularity will tell him whether or not he is right.

The editor of an anthology must consider all these things in making his selections. If he allows his own individual preferences to dictate his choice in too many cases, his collection will not be popular with very many readers. An author who has achieved reputation and popularity must be recognized and included even if the editor chances not to be among his admirers. It is safe,—more, it is necessary,—to select, for the "best one hundred," stories of widely differing types and stories by authors whom the

public has voted best by buying their books in large numbers.

The practise of creating a distinct personality as the sleuth who dominates all of an author's detective stories has become almost universal, and many writers are associated inseparably with their favorite sleuth. In the present anthology I have gathered together many of these famous master detectives of fiction from America and Europe, for the first time, in a world congress to display their skill in solving crime mysteries and catching criminals.

Most of the great detective stories of the past have been reprinted again and again, and there seems little need to repeat them in this anthology. I have planned to make this. rather, a representative collection of modern authors, and altho much expense for copyright fees could have been saved by including the old stand-bys, I have dared to omit even Poe's masterpiece, "The Purloined Letter," altho threatened with death myself by a friend who promises to "bite me in the thorax" for such heresy. Everybody knows Poe's classic stories, or ought to. Anyone who hasn't read "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Gold Bug," and all the rest, should buy a handy set of Poe's works without delay.

This is a truly international anthology. There are 52 American stories and 49 from England, France, and Germany. The detective story has great vogue in England. Recent press dispatches tell how "King George is fighting his way back to health on a literary diet of detective yarns and thrilling mystery stories." After his long and almost fatal illness, we are told that "thrillers and detective tales fascinate King George." The Prince of Wales and the great British public feel the same way.

In the United States the popularity of detective stories has been growing beyond all bounds. Leading publishers have remarked upon it as the outstanding phenomenon of the book trade. And the flood of detective novels and short stories is increasing to a deluge. The public appetite seems insatiable. One man told me recently that he has read, in the last thirty-five years 3500 full-length detective

novels and more than 1500 short detective stories. Those who claim to know say that "detective stories meet the recreational needs of all classes of humanity, from the college professor, the scholar, the diplomat, and the scientist, all the way down to the most primitive and untutored reader. They appeal directly to the intelligence: they are a source of mental stimulation. The finest minds in America to-day read them." Much publicity has been given to the fact that such men as President Hoover, Ambassador Morrow, Ex-Secretary of State Kellogg, and J. Pierpont Morgan are devotees of the detective story. The University of Chicago has demonstrated scientifically that detective tales are a good tonic for tired nerves, and many overwrought business men are known to find relief in this absorbing type of fiction.

Acknowledgment to author, publisher, and copyright owner has been made, as fully as possible, on the first page of each story in this collection. But I can not be content without a warmer word of appreciation for the very cordial and friendly cooperation extended to me by the publishers, the authors, and their literary agents in gathering these stories. They have made it a pleasant task. I sincerely hope they will feel some satisfaction in the result.

EUGENE THWING.

October, 1929

# THE WORLD'S BEST 100 DETECTIVE STORIES

## SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

### THE ONE BEST BET

"Morrison has jammed the Personal Liberty bill through," said Waldemar, scrawling a head on his completed editorial, with one eye on the clock, which pointed to midnight.

"That was to be expected, wasn't it?" asked Average Jones.

"Oh, yes," replied the editor-owner of the *Universal* in his heavy bass. "And now the governor announces he will veto it."

"Thereby bringing the whole power of the gambling ring down on him like an avalanche."

"Naturally. Morrison has declared open war against 'Pharisee Phil,' as he calls Governor Arthur. Says he'll pass the bill over his veto. In his heart he knows he can't do it. Still, he's a hard fighter."

Average Jones tipped his chair back against the wall of the editorial sanctum. "What do you suppose," he inquired with an air of philosophic speculation, "that the devil will do with Carroll Morrison's soul when he gets it? Deodorize it?"

"Harsh words, young sir! Harsh words and treasonable against one of our leading citizens; multimillionaire philanthropist, social leader, director of banks, insurance com-

(From "Average Jones," by Samuel Hopkins Adams; copyright 1911. Used by special permission of the publishers, The Bobbs-Merrill Company. Copyright in Great Britain by Samuel Hopkins Adams.)

panies and railroads, and emperor of the race-track, the sport of kings."

"The sport of kings—maintained on the spoils of clerks," retorted Average Jones. " 'To improve the breed of horses,' if you please! To make thieves of men and harlots of women, because Carroll Morrison must have his gambling-game dividends! And now he has our 'representative' legislature working for him to that honorable end!"

"Man to see you, Mr. Waldemar," said an office boy, appearing at the door.

"Too late," grunted the editor.

"He says it's very particular, sir, and to tell you it's something Mr. Morrison is interested in."

"Morrison, eh? All right. Just step into the inner office, will you, Jones? Leave the door open. There might be something interesting."

Hardly had Average Jones found a chair in the darkened office when the late caller appeared. He was middle-aged, pursy, and dressed with slap-dash ostentation. His face was bloated and seared with excesses. But it was not intoxication that sweated on his forehead and quivered in his jaw. It was terror. He slumped into the waiting chair and mouthed mutely at the editor.

"Well?" The bullet-like snap of the interrogation stung the man into babbling speech.

" 'S like this, Misser Wald'mar. 'S like this. Y-y-yuh see, 's like this. Fer Gawsake, kill out an ad for me!"

"What? In to-morrow's paper? Nonsense! You're too late, even if I wished to do it."

The visitor stood up and dug both hands into his side pockets. He produced, first a binocular, which, with a snarl, he flung upon the floor. Before it had stopped bumping, there fluttered down upon the seat of his chair a handful of greenbacks. Another followed, and another, and another. The bills toppled and spread, and some of them slid to the floor. Still the man delved.

"There!" he panted at last. "Money talks. There's the stuff. Count it. Eighteen hundred if there's a dollar. More

likely two thou. If that ain't enough, make your own price. I don't care what it is. Make it, Misser. Put a price on it."

There was something loathsome and obscene in the creature's gibbering flux of words. The editor leaned forward.

"Bribery, eh?" he inquired softly.

The man flinched from the tone. "It ain't bribery, is it, to ast you to rout out jus' one line from an ad an' pay you for the trouble. My own ad, too. If it runs, it's my finish. I was nutty when I wrote it. Fer Gawsake, Misser—"

"Stop it! You say Morrison sent you here?"

"No, sir. Not exac-ly. 'S like this, Misser Wald'mar. I hadda get to you some way. It's important to Misser Morrison, too. But he don't know I come. He don't know nothing about it. Oh, Gaw! If he finds out—"

"Put that money back in your pockets."

With an ashen face of despair, the man obeyed. As he finished, he began to sag at the joints. Slowly he slackened down until he was on his knees, an abject spectacle of disgust.

"Stand up," ordered Waldemar.

"Liss'n; liss'n t' me," moaned the man. "I'll make it three thousand. Fi' thou—"

"Stand *up!*"

The editor's hearty grip on his coat collar heaved the creature to his feet. For a moment he struggled, panting, then spun, helpless and headlong from the room, striking heavily against the passage-wall outside. There was a half-choked groan; then his footsteps slumped away into silence.

"Ugh!" grunted Waldemar. "Come back, Jones."

Average Jones reëntered. "Have you no curiosity in your composition?" he asked.

"Not much—having been reared in the newspaper business."

Stooping, Average Jones picked up the glasses which the man had thrown on the floor and examined them

carefully. "Rather a fine instrument," he observed. "Marked N. K. I think I'll follow up the owner."

"You'll never find him now. He has too much start."

"Not at all. When a man is in his state of abject funk, it's ten to one he lands at the nearest bar. Wait for me."

In fifteen minutes Average Jones was back. There was a curious expression on his face as he nodded an assent to his friend's inquiring eyebrows.

"Where?" asked Waldemar.

"On the floor of a Park Row saloon."

"Dead drunk, eh?"

"No—er; not—er—drunk. Dead."

Waldemar stiffened in his chair. "Dead!" he repeated.

"Poison, probably. The ad was his finish, as he said. The next thing is to find it."

"The first edition will be down any minute now. But it'll take some finding. Why, counting 'classified,' we're carrying fifteen hundred ads in every issue. With no clue to the character of this one—"

"Plenty of clue," said Average Jones suavely. "You'll find it on the sporting page, I think."

"Judging from the man's appearance? Rather far-fetched, isn't it?"

"Judging from a pair of very fine binoculars, a mention of Carroll Morrison's name, and, principally, some two thousand dollars in a huge heap."

"I don't quite see where that leads."

"No? The bills must have been mostly ones and twos. Those are a book-maker's takings. The binocular is a racing-man's glass. Our late friend used the language of the track. I think we'll find him on page nine."

"Try," said Waldemar, handing him a paper still spicy with the keen odor of printer's ink.

Swiftly the Ad-Visor's practiced eye ran over the column. It checked at the "offer" of a notorious firm of tipsters who advertised to sell "inside information" on the races to their patrons. As a special lure, they were, on this day, letting the public in on a few particularly "good things" free.

"There you are," said Average Jones, pointing out the advertisement.

To his astonishment, Waldemar noted that his friend's indicatory finger shook a little. Normally, Average Jones was the coolest and most controlled of men.

"Noble and Gale's form ad," he observed. "I see nothing unusual in that."

"Yet—er—I fancy it's quite important—er—in its way."

The editor stared. "When you talk like a bored Britisher, Average," he remarked, "there's sure to be something in the air. What is it?"

"Look at the last line."

Again Waldemar turned to the paper. " 'One Best Bet,' " he read. " 'That the Pharisee will never finish.' Well?"

" 'That the Pharisee will never finish,' " repeated Average Jones. "If the Pharisee is a horse, the line becomes absurd at once. How could any one know that a horse would fail to finish in a race? But if it—er—referred—er—to a man, an official known—er—as Pharisee Phil—"

"Wait!" Waldemar had jumped to his feet. A thrill, increasing and pulsating through the floor beneath them, shook the building. The editor jumped for the telephone.

"Composing room; quick! Give me the foreman. Hello! That you, Corrigan? Stop the presses. . . . I don't care if we miss every train in the country. . . . Don't answer back. This is Mr. Waldemar. Stop the presses!"

The thrill waned and ceased. At the telephone, Waldemar continued: "Look up the Noble and Gale tip ad, page nine, column six. Kill the last line—the One Best Bet. . . . Don't ask *me* how. Chisel it out. Burn it out. Dynamite it out. But kill it. After that's done, print. . . . Hello; Dan? Send the sporting editor in here in a hurry."

"Good work," said Average Jones. "They'll never know how near their idea of removing Governor Arthur came to being boasted of in plain print."

Waldemar took his huge head in his hands and rocked it gently. "It's on," he said. "And right-side-before. Yet, it tries to tell me that a man, plotting to murder the

governor, advertises the fact in my paper! I'll get a new head."

"Keep that one for a while," advised Average Jones. "It may be better than you think. Anyway, here's the ad. And down yonder is the dead man whom it killed when he failed to kill it. So much is real."

"And here's Bendig," said the other, as the sporting editor entered. "Any such horse as 'The Pharisee,' Bendig?"

"No, sir. I suppose you mean that Noble and Gale ad. I saw it in proof. Some of Nick Karboe's funny work, I expect."

"Nick Karboe; N. K.," murmured Average Jones, laying a hand on the abandoned field glass. "Who is this man Karboe, Mr. Bendig?"

"Junior partner of Noble and Gale. He puts out their advertising."

"Any connection whatever with Mr. Carroll Morrison?"

"Why, yes. Before he went to pieces he used to be Mr. Morrison's confidential man, and lately he's been doing some lobbying for the association. I understood he'd quit it again."

"Quit what?" asked Waldemar. "Drink?"

"Worse. The white stuff. Coke."

Average Jones whistled softly. "That explains it all," he said. "A cocaine field on a debauch becomes a mental and moral imbecile. It would be perfectly in character that he should boast of a projected crime."

"Very well," said Waldemar, after the sporting editor had left, "but you don't really connect Morrison with this?"

"Don't I? At least I propose to try. See here, Waldemar; two months ago at a private dinner, Morrison made a speech in which he said that men who interfered with the rights of property, like Governor Arthur, were no better than anarchists and ought to be handled accordingly. Therefore, I don't think that a plan—a safe one, of course—to put 'Pharisee Phil' away would greatly disturb our friend's distorted conscience. You see, the governor has

laid impious hands on Morrison's holy of holies, the dividend. By the way, where is Governor Arthur?"

"On the train for this city. He's to review the parade at the Harrisonia Centennial, and unveil the statue tomorrow night; that is, to-night, to be accurate."

"A good opportunity," murmured Average Jones.

"What! In the sight of a hundred thousand people?"

"That might be the very core of the opportunity. And at night."

"If you feel certain, it's a case for the police, isn't it?"

"Hardly! The gambling gang control the police, wholly. They would destroy the trail at once."

"Then why not warn the governor?"

"I don't know him."

"Suppose I make an appointment to take you to see him in the morning?"

This was agreed upon. At ten o'clock Governor Arthur received them at his hotel, greeting Average Jones with flattering warmth.

"You're the amateur detective who scared the Honorable William Linder out of the mayoralty nomination," said he, shaking hands. "What are you going to do to me?"

"Give you some racing news to read, Governor."

The governor took the advertisement proof and read it carefully. Characteristically, he then re-read it throughout.

"You think this is meant for me?" he asked, handing it back.

"I do. You're not exactly what one would call popular with the racing crowd, you know, Governor."

"Mr. Morrison, in the politest manner in the world, has allowed me to surmise as much," said the other, smiling broadly. "A very polished person, Mr. Morrison. He can make threats of extinction—political, of course—more delicately than any other subtle blackmailer I have ever met. And I have met several in my time."

"If this were merely political extinction, which I fancy

you can take care of yourself, I shouldn't be taking up your time, sir."

"My dear Jones"—a friendly hand fell on the visitor's shoulder—"I gravely fear that you lack the judicial mind. It's a great thing—to lack—at times." Governor Arthur's eyes twinkled again, and his visitor wondered whence had come his reputation as a dry, unhumorous man. "As to assassination," he pursued, "I'm a sort of Christian Scientist. The best protection is a profound conviction that you're safe. That reacts on the mind of any would-be assassin. To my mind, my best chance of safety lies in never thinking of danger."

"Then," said Waldemar, "any attempt to persuade you against appearing at Harrisonia to-night would be time wasted."

"Absolutely, my dear Waldemar. But don't think that I'm not appreciative of your thoughtfulness and that of Mr. Jones."

"What is the program of the day, Governor?" asked Average Jones.

"Rather a theatrical one. I'm to ride along Harrison Avenue to the reviewing stand, in the old coach-of-state of the Harrison family, a lofty old ark, high as a circus wagon, which has been patched up for the occasion. Just before I reach the reviewing stand, a silk cord is to be handed to me and I am to pull the veil from the great civic statue with that, as I move on."

"Then I think that Mr. Waldemar and I will look the ground over. Could we get you by telephone, sir, if necessary?"

"Any time up to seven o'clock."

"What do you think of the chance of their passing the bill over your veto?" asked Waldemar.

"They are spending money as it has never been spent before," replied Governor Arthur. "I'll admit to you, Waldemar, that if I could find any legitimate method of calling Morrison off, I would not scruple to use it. It is, of course, Morrison's money that we are fighting."

"Possibly—er—that, too—er—might be done," drawled Average Jones.

The governor looked at him sharply. "After the Linder affair, Mr. Jones," said he, "I would follow you far. Call my secretary at any time, if you want me."

"Now to look over the line of parade," said Average Jones as he and Waldemar emerged from the hotel.

Half an hour's ride brought them to the lively suburban city of Harrisonia, gay with flags and bunting. From the railroad station, where the guest of honor was to be met by the old coach, to the spot where the civic statue awaited its unveiling at his hands, was about half a mile along Harrison Avenue, the principal street. The walk along this street developed nothing of interest to Average Jones until they reached the statue. Here he paused to look curiously at a number of square platforms built out from windows in the business blocks.

"For flash-light outfits," explained Waldemar. "One of them is our paper's."

"Flash-lights, eh?" said Average Jones. "And there'll be fireworks and the air will be full of light and noise, under cover of which almost anything might be done. I don't like it! Hello! What's here?"

He turned to the glass front of a prosperous-looking cigar store on the south side of the avenue and pointed to a shattered hole in the window. Behind it a bullet swung on a thread from the ceiling, and this agent of disaster the proprietor had ingeniously turned to account in advertising, by the following placard:

AIM LOWER

If you expect to shoot holes in *our* prices.

WE CHALLENGE COMPETITION.

"Not bad," approved Average Jones. "I feel a great yearning to smoke."

They entered the store and were served by the proprietor. As he was making change, Average Jones asked:

"When was the bombardment?"

"Night before last, sometime," replied the man.

"Done by a deflected bullet, wasn't it?"

"Haven't any idea how it was done or why. I got here in the morning and there she was. What makes you think it was a deflected bullet?"

"Because it was whirling end-over. Normally, a bullet bores a pretty clean hole in plate glass."

"That's so, too," agreed the man with some interest.

Average Jones handed a cigar to Waldemar and lighted one himself. Puffing at is as he walked to the door, he gazed casually around and finally centered his attention on a telegraph pole standing on the edge of the sidewalk. He even walked out and around the pole. Returning, he remarked to the tobacconist:

"Very good cigars, these. Ever advertise 'em?"

"Sure." The man displayed a tin square vaunting the virtues of his "Camarados."

"Outside the shop, I meant. Why wouldn't one of those signs look good on that telegraph pole?"

"It would look good to me," said the vendor, "but it wouldn't look good to the telegraph people. They'd have it down."

"Oh, I don't know. Give me one, lend me a ladder, and I'll make the experiment."

The tobacconist stared. "All right," he said. "Go as far as you like." And he got the required articles for his customer.

With silent curiosity Waldemar watched Average Jones place the ladder against the outside of the pole, mount, nail up the sign, drop a plumb-line, improvised from a key and a length of string, to the ground, set a careful knot in the string and return to earth.

"What did you find?" asked the editor.

"Four holes that you could cover with a silver dollar. Some gunnery, that!"

"Then how did the other shot happen to go so far wrong?"

"Do you see that steel work over there?"

Average Jones pointed across to the north side of the street, just opposite, where a number of buildings had been torn down to permit of the erection of a new one. The frame had risen three stories, and through the open spaces in the gaunt skeleton the rear of the houses facing on the street next northward could be seen. Waldemar indicated that he did see the edifice pointed out by Average Jones.

"The bullet came from back of that—perhaps from the next street. They sighted by the telegraph pole. Suppose, now, a man riding in a high coach passes along this avenue between the pole and the gun operator, over yonder to the northward. Every one of the bullets which hit the pole would have gone right through his body. Probably a fixed gun. As for the wide shot, we'll see."

As he spoke, the Ad-Visor was leading the way across the street. With upturned face he carefully studied the steel joists from end to end. Presently he pointed. Following the line of his finger, Waldemar saw a raw scar on the under side of one of the joists.

"There it is," said Average Jones. "The sights were a trifle off at the first shot, and the bullet ticked the steel and deflected."

"So far, so good," approved Waldemar.

"I can approximate the height of the steel beam from the ground, close enough for a trial formula," continued Average Jones. "Now, Waldemar, I call your attention to that restaurant on the opposite corner."

Waldemar conned the designated building with attention. "Well," he said finally, "what of it? I don't see anything wrong with it."

"Precisely my point," returned the Ad-Visor with a grin. "Neither do I. Therefore, suppose you go there and order luncheon for two, while I walk down to the next block and back again. I'll be with you in four minutes."

He was somewhat better than his word. Dropping into the chair opposite his friend, he figured swiftly and briefly

on the back of an envelope, which he returned to his pocket.

"I suppose you've done a vast amount of investigating since you left me," remarked the editor sardonically. "Meanwhile, the plot to murder the governor goes merrily on."

"I've done a fair amount of pacing over distance," retorted Average Jones imperturbably. "As for the governor, they can't kill him till he comes, can they? Besides, there's plenty of time for them to change their minds. As a result of my little constitutional just now, as a simple exercise in mathematics, you and I will call at a house on Spencer Street, the next street north, after luncheon."

"What house?"

"Ah! that I don't know, as yet. We'll see when we get there."

Comfortably fed, the two strolled up to Spencer Street and turned into it, Average Jones eying the upper windows of the houses. He stopped in front of an old-fashioned frame structure which was built on a different plan of floor level from its smaller neighbors of brick. Up the low steps went Jones, followed by the editor. An aged lady, of the species commonly conjectured as "maiden," opened the door.

"Madam," said Average Jones, "could we rent your third floor rear for this evening?"

"No, sir," said she. "It's rented."

"Perhaps I could buy the renters off," suggested Jones. "Could I see them?"

"Both out," she answered shortly. "And I don't believe you could get the room from them, for they're all fixed up to take photographs of the parade."

"Indee—ee—eed," drawled Average Jones, in accents so prolonged, even for him, that Waldemar's interest flamed within him. "I—er—ra—a—a—ather hoped—er—when do you expect them back?"

"About four o'clock."

"Thank you. Please tell them that—er—Mr. Nick Karboe called."

"For heaven's sake, Average," rumbled Waldemar, as they regained the pavement, "why did you use the dead man's name? It gave me a shiver."

"It'll give them a worse one," replied the Ad-Visor grimly. "I want to prepare their nerves for a subsequent shock. If you'll meet me here this evening at seven, I think I can promise you a queer spectacle."

"And meantime?"

"On that point I want your advice. Shall we make a sure catch of two hired assassins who don't amount to much, or take a chance at the bigger game?"

"Meaning Morrison?"

"Meaning Morrison. Incidentally, if we get him we'll be able to kill the Personal Liberty bill so dead it will never raise its head again."

"Then I'm for that course," decided the editor, after a little consideration, "though I can't yet make myself believe that Carroll Morrison is party to a deliberate murder plot."

"How the normal mind does shrink from connecting crime with good clothes and a social position!" remarked the Ad-Visor. "Just give me a moment's time."

The moment he spent jotting down words on a bit of paper, which, after some emendation, he put away.

"That'll do for a heading," he remarked. "Now, Waldemar, I want you to get the governor on the 'phone and tell him, if he'll follow directions, we'll put the Personal Liberty bill where the wicked cease from troubling. Morrison is to be in the reviewing stand, isn't he?"

"Yes; there's a special place reserved for him, next the press seats."

"Good! By the way, you'd better send for two press seats for you and myself. Now, what I want the governor to do is this: get a copy of the Harrisonia *Evening Bell*, fold it to an advertisement headed 'Offer to Photographers,' and as he passes Carroll Morrison on the stand, hold it up and say to him just this: 'Better luck next time.' For anything further, I'll see you in the reviewing stand. Do you think he'll do it?"

"It sounds as foolish as a college initiation stunt. Still, you heard what Governor Arthur said about his confidence in you. But what is this advertisement?"

"As yet, it isn't. But it will be, as soon as I can get to the office of the *Bell*. You'll meet me on this corner at seven o'clock, then?"

"Yes. Meantime, to be safe, I'll look after the reviewing stand tickets myself."

At the hour named, the editor arrived. Average Jones was already there, accompanied by a messenger boy. The boy wore the cheerful grin of one who has met with an unexpected favor of fortune.

"They've returned, both of 'em," said Average Jones as Waldemar approached. "What about the governor?"

"It took a mighty lot of persuasion, but he'll do it," replied the editor.

"Skip, son," said the Ad-Visor, handing the messenger boy a folded newspaper. "The two gentlemen on the third floor rear. And be sure you say that it's a personal, marked copy."

The boy crossed the street and entered the house. In two minutes he emerged, nodded to Average Jones and walked away. Five minutes passed. Then the front door opened cautiously and a tall, evil-looking man slunk into the vestibule. A second man followed him. They glanced eagerly from left to right. Average Jones stepped out to the curbstone.

"Here's the message from Karboe," he called.

"My God!" gasped the tall man.

For an instant he made as if to turn back. Then, clearing the steps at one jump, he stumbled, sprawled, was up again instantly and speeding up the street, away from Average Jones, turned the corner neck and neck with his companion who, running powerfully, had overtaken him.

The door of the house stood ajar. Before Waldemar had recovered from his surprise, Average Jones was inside the house. Hesitation beset the editor. Should he follow or wait? He paused, one foot on the step. A loud crash within resolved his doubts. Up he started, when the voice of

Average Jones in colloquy with the woman who had received them before, checked him. The colloquy seemed excited but peaceful. Presently Average Jones came down the steps.

"They left the ad," said he. "Have you seen it?"

"No; I hadn't time to get a paper," replied Waldemar, taking the copy extended to him and reading, in large display:

OFFER TO PHOTOGRAPHERS

$1,000 Reward for Special Flash-light Photo of Governor Arthur in To-night's Pageant. Must be Taken According to Plans and Specifications Designated by the Late Nick Karboe.

Apply to A. Jones, Ad-Visor.

Astor Court Temple, New York City.

"No wonder they ran," said Waldemar with a grin, as he digested this document.

"And so must we if we're to get through the crowd and reach the reviewing stand," warned Average Jones, glancing at his watch.

Their seats, which they attained with some difficulty, were within a few feet of the governor's box. Within reach of them sat Carroll Morrison, his long, pale, black-bearded face set in that immobility to which he had schooled it. But the cold eyes roved restlessly and the little muscles at the corners of the lips twitched.

"Tell me that he isn't in on the game!" whispered Average Jones, and Waldemar nodded.

The sound of music from down the street turned all faces in that direction. A roar of cheering swept toward them and was taken up in the stands. The governor, in his high coach, came in sight. And, at that moment, terror struck into the soul of Waldemar.

"Suppose they came back!" he whispered to Average Jones. "We've left the house unguarded."

"I've fixed that," replied the Ad-Visor in the same tone. "Watch Morrison!"

Governor Arthur approached the civic statue. An official, running out to the coach, handed him a silken cord, which he secured with a turn around the wrist. The coach rolled on. The cord tautened; the swathings sundered and fell from the gleaming splendor of marble, and a blinding flash, followed by another, and a third, blotted out the scene in unbearable radiance.

Involuntarily Morrison, like thousands of others, had screened his sight with his hands after the second flash. Now, as the kindlier light returned, he half rose, rubbing his eyes furiously. A half-groan escaped him. He sank back, staring in amaze. For Governor Arthur was riding on, calm and smiling amid the shouts.

Morrison shrank. Could it be that the governor's eyes were fixed on his? He strove to shake off the delusion. He felt, rather than saw, the guest of honor descend from the coach; felt rather than saw him making straight toward himself; and he winced and quivered at the sound of his own name.

"Mr. Morrison," the governor was saying, at his elbow, "Mr. Morrison, here is a paper that may interest you. Better luck next time."

Morrison strove to reply. His voice clucked in his throat, and the hand with which he took the folded newspaper was as the hand of a paralytic.

"He's broken," whispered Average Jones.

He went straight to Governor Arthur, speaking in his ear. The governor nodded. Average Jones returned to his seat to watch Carroll Morrison who sat, with hell-fires of fear scorching him, until the last band had blared its way into silence.

Again the governor was speaking to him.

"Mr. Morrison, I want you to visit a house near here. Mr. Jones and Mr. Waldemar will come along; you know

them, perhaps. Please don't protest. I positively will not take a refusal. We have a motor-car waiting."

Furious, but not daring to refuse, Morrison found himself whirled swiftly away, and after a few turns to shake off the crowd, into Spencer Street. With his captors, he mounted to the third floor of an old frame house. The rear room door had been broken in. Inside stood a strange instrument, resembling a large camera, which had once stood upright on a steel tripod riveted to the floor. The legs of the tripod were twisted and bent. A half-demolished chair nearby suggested the agency of destruction.

"Just to render it harmless," explained Average Jones. "It formerly pointed through that window, so that a bullet from the barrel would strike that pole 'way yonder in Harrison Street, after first passing through an intervening body. Yours, for instance, Governor."

"Do I understand that this is a gun, Mr. Jones?" asked that official.

"Of a sort," replied the Ad-Visor, opening up the camera-box and showing a large barrel superimposed on a smaller one. "This is a sighting-glass," he explained, tapping the larger barrel. "And this," tapping the smaller, "carries a small but efficient bullet. This curious sheath" —he pointed to a cylindrical jacket around part of the rifle barrel—"is a Coulomb silencer, which reduces a small-arm report almost to a whisper. Here is an electric button which was connected with yonder battery before I operated on it with the chair, and distributed its spark, part to the gun, part to the flash-light powder on this little shelf. Do you see the plan now? The instant that the governor, riding through the street yonder, is sighted through this glass, the operator presses the button, and flash-light and bullet go off instantaneously."

"But why the flash-light?" asked the governor.

"Merely a blind to fool the landlady and avert any possible suspicion. They had told her that they had a new invention to take flash-lights at a distance. Amidst the other flashes, this one wouldn't be noticed particularly. They had covered their trail well."

"Well, indeed," said the governor. "May I congratulate you, Mr. Morrison, on this interesting achievement in ballistics?"

"As there is no way of properly resenting an insult from a man in your position," said Morrison venomously, "I will reserve my answer to that outrageous suggestion."

"Meantime," put in Average Jones, "let me direct your attention to a simple mathematical formula." He drew from his pocket an envelope on which were drawn some angles, subjoined by a formula. Morrison waved it aside.

"Not interested in mathematics?" asked Average Jones solicitously. "Very well, I'll elucidate informally. Given a bullet hole in a telegraph pole at a certain distance, a bullet scar on an iron girder at a certain lesser distance, and the length of a block from here to Harrison Avenue—which I paced off while you were skillfully ordering luncheon, Waldemar—and an easy triangulation brings us direct to this room and to two fugitive gentlemen with whom—I mention the hypothesis with all deference, Mr. Morrison—you are probably acquainted."

"And who may they have been?" retorted Morrison contemptuously.

"I don't know," said Average Jones.

"Then, sir," retorted the racing king, "your hypothesis is as impudent as your company is intolerable. Have you anything further to say to me?"

"Yes. It would greatly please Mr. Waldemar to publish in to-morrow's paper an authorized statement from you to the effect that the Personal Liberty bill will be withdrawn permanently."

"Mr. Waldemar may go to the devil. I have endured all the hectoring I propose to. Men in my position are targets for muckrakers and blackmailers—"

"Wait a moment," Waldemar's heavy voice broke in. "You speak of men in your position. Do you understand just what position you are in at present?"

Morrison rose. "Governor Arthur," he said with stony dignity, "I bid you good evening."

Waldemar set his bulky back against the door. The lips

drew back from Morrison's strong teeth with the snarl of an animal in the fury and terror of approaching peril.

"Do you know Nick Karboe?"

Morrison whirled about to face Average Jones. But he did not answer the question. He only stared.

"Carroll Morrison," continued Average Jones in his quiet drawl, "the half-hour before he—er—committed suicide—er—Nick Karboe spent in the office of the—er—*Universal* with Mr. Waldemar and—er—myself. Catch him, Waldemar!"

For Morrison had wilted. They propped him against the wall and he, the man who had insolently defied the laws of a great commonwealth, who had bribed legislators and bossed judges and browbeaten the public, slobbered, denied and begged. For two disgustful minutes they extracted from him his solemn promise that henceforth he would keep his hands off the laws. Then they turned him out.

"Suppose you enlighten me with the story, gentlemen," suggested the governor.

Average Jones told it, simply and modestly. At the conclusion, Governor Arthur looked from the wrecked camera-gun to the mathematical formula which had fallen to the floor.

"Mr. Jones," he said, "you've done me the service of saving my life; you've done the public the service of killing a vicious bill. I wish I could thank you more publicly than this."

"Thank you, Governor," said Average Jones modestly. "But I owed the public something, you know, on account of my uncle, the late Mayor Van Reypen."

Governor Arthur nodded. "The debt is paid," he said. "That knowledge must be your reward; that and the consciousness of having worked out a remarkable and original problem."

"Original?" said Average Jones, eying the diagram on the envelope's back, with his quaint smile. "Why, Governor, you're giving me too much credit. It was worked out by one of the greatest detectives of all time, some two thousand years ago. His name was Euclid."

# H. C. BAILEY

## THE LITTLE HOUSE

Mrs. Pemberton always calls it providential. She is not the only one. But when he hears her say so Mr. Fortune looks at her with a certain envy. It is one of the few cases which have frightened him.

The hand of providence, Mrs. Pemberton is convinced, sent her to Mr. Fortune: and she only just caught him. He was, with reluctance, leaving his fire to go to Scotland Yard about the man who died in Kensington Gardens when her card was brought to him. "I was to tell you Mrs. Warnham sent her, sir," the parlor maid explained.

Mr. Fortune went down to receive a little old lady dressed like Queen Victoria. She had a rosy round face and a lot of white hair. Her manner was not royal but very feminine. "Mr. Fortune! How good of you to help me! Mrs. Warnham said you would." She clasped his hands. "You were so beautiful with her."

"Mrs. Warnham is too kind—"

"You saved her dear boy's life."

"I hope it's nothing like that," said Mr. Fortune anxiously.

Mrs. Pemberton wiped her eyes and the white lilac on her black bonnet shook. "No, indeed. My darling Vivian is quite well. But she has lost her kitten, Mr. Fortune!"

Mr. Fortune controlled his emotions. "I'm so sorry. I'm afraid kittens aren't much in my way."

Her nice face looked distress. "I know. That's what I said to Mrs. Warnham. I told her you wouldn't want to

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be bothered with it, you would only laugh at me, like the police."

"But I'm not laughing," said Reggie.

"Please don't." Her nice voice was anxious. "She said I was to go and tell you I was really troubled and you would listen."

"She was quite right."

"I am dreadfully troubled." She wrung her little hands. "You see, it's the strange way it went and the people next door are so peculiar and I know the police don't take it seriously. The officer was quite civil and attentive, but he smiled, you know, Mr. Fortune, he just smiled at me."

"I know," said Reggie. "They do smile. I've felt it myself."

"Don't they," Mrs. Pemberton sighed. "Mrs. Warnham said you would understand."

"Yes. Yes. She's very kind. Perhaps if you began at the beginning."

Mrs. Pemberton had difficulty over that. Her nice mind worked on the theory that everybody knew all about her. The facts when patiently extracted and put in order by Reggie took this shape. She was a widow, her only son was a general commanding in India. She lived in Elector's Gate, one of those streets of big Victorian houses by the park. Her granddaughter Vivian, aged six, had lately come to live with her and brought a gray Persian kitten. With care and pains a garden had been persuaded to bloom behind the house. There Vivian and her kitten were playing when the kitten went over the wall. Vivian scrambled up high enough to look over and saw it in the paved yard of the house next door, saw a little girl run out of that house, snatch up the kitten and run in again. Vivian called to her and was not answered. Vivian came weeping to Mrs. Pemberton. Mrs. Pemberton put on her bonnet and called at the house next door. She was told that nobody had been out at the back, no kitten had come in, they had no kitten, her granddaughter must have made a mistake. They were not at all nice about it.

"Who are they?" said Reggie.

It was Miss Cabot. Miss Cabot and her father lived there. She did not really know them, only to bow to. But they had been there quite a long while, a dozen years or more, very quiet people, perfect neighbors, never the least trouble till this dreadful thing. But of course Mrs. Pemberton couldn't let them take Vivian's kitten. She went to the police station and complained. And the police wouldn't take it seriously at all.

Mr. Fortune, with her innocent blue eyes upon him, contrived to do that. It has been remarked by the envious that he has great success with old ladies. Mrs. Pemberton went away murmuring that he had been so kind. He was left wondering how long she would think so. It did not seem to him a case over which the police would be persuaded to lose much sleep. But it had points which occupied his mind as he drove down to Scotland Yard.

He was late for his appointment. "Ye gentlemen of England who sit at home at ease!" the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department rebuked him. "This luncheon habit is growing on you, Fortune!" He pointed an accusing finger at Reggie's girth.

"It wasn't lunch," said Reggie with indignation. "I've had a most difficult and interestin' case."

Lomas sat up. "Difficult, was it? Come along then. Avery's full of ideas about it. What was the cause of death?"

Reggie stared at him. Reggie looked at Inspector Avery and murmured: "How are you?" Reggie stared again at Lomas. "Cause of death? Oh, ah. You mean the man found in Kensington Gardens."

"That is what I'm talking about," said Lomas with some bitterness. "That happens to be what we're here for."

"Nothing in it. He died from exposure."

"Exposure, sir?" Inspector Avery was disappointed. "Just being out on a spring night?"

"Takin' the winds of March," Reggie shrugged. "He wasn't a good life. Badly nourished. Rotten heart. Noth-

ing much good about him. Drug habits—and other errors. Who was he?"

"In the foreign restaurant business, sir. Lots of money. Quite a big man in his own line. Why he should go and lie down in the gardens to die beats me."

Reggie shrugged again. "He just got there and got no farther. No vitality in him. He'd go out at a breath."

"You said something about drugs, sir?"

"Oh, he wasn't drugged when he died. Probably he had run out of his dope and life wasn't worth living. And the night frost finished him."

Lomas lay back. "That clears him up, Avery. You can go home to tea."

But Inspector Avery was not satisfied. "Mr. Fortune was worried about something, sir?"

"Yes, yes. Most interesting case. Is Elector's Gate in your division?"

"That's right, sir."

"What do you know about Mrs. Pemberton's Persian kitten?"

Lomas put up his eyeglass. "My dear fellow!" he protested.

Inspector Avery also felt a shock to his dignity. "They don't come to me about kittens, sir."

"They come to me," said Reggie sadly. "It wasn't you that smiled, then?"

"Sir?"

"Mrs. Pemberton says she went to the station and they only smiled. Quite sweet but smiling. It hurts her."

"I do remember hearing talk of it," Inspector Avery admitted. "The lady was so pathetic. But they did the usual, sir, sent a sergeant round to the house where the kitten was supposed to have gone in. The lady there said they hadn't got it. Her little niece did try to catch it, but it got away. We couldn't do any more."

Reggie lit a cigar. "'Her little niece did try to catch it,'" he repeated slowly. "Now that's very interesting." He gazed at the puzzled inspector through smoke.

"It might be if I knew anything about it," Lomas grumbled. "Why this devotion to kittens, Reginald?"

So Reggie told him the story Mrs. Pemberton had told.

"Very, very sad," Lomas sighed. "But kittens will be cats. What do you want me to do? Leave a card with deep sympathy and regret?"

Reggie shook his head. "Not one of our good listeners," he said sadly. "Didn't you notice anything? You're not taking this seriously, Lomas. When Mrs. Pemberton called about the kitten, Miss Cabot said no one had been out at the back. When the police called, she said her little niece did try to catch it."

Lomas put up his eyeglass. "Aha! The case looks black indeed!" said he. "Miss Cabot didn't know about the little niece at first and found out afterwards. A deep, dark woman, Fortune," and he smiled.

"Yes. A facetious force, the police force," Reggie nodded. "That's what annoyed Mrs. Pemberton. And now do you mind thinking? A dear old lady calls very distressed and says Miss Cabot's little girl has caught her kitten and Miss Cabot says there wasn't any little girl and bundles her out. Why so curt? Because there was a little girl and there was a kitten." He turned on Inspector Avery. "Did your sergeant see the little girl?"

"No, sir. No occasion. He saw Miss Cabot, who was quite definite the kitten got away."

"Yes. Marked anxiety to know nothing about the kitten. Elusive little girl."

"My dear Reginald!" Lomas protested. "There's a dozen obvious explanations. The woman doesn't like cats. The little girl is a naughty little girl. The woman doesn't want to be bothered."

"No. She doesn't want to be bothered. That's what struck me."

"I fear your dear Mrs. Pemberton is a little fussy, Reginald."

"That isn't your complaint, Lomas," Reggie said

sharply. "Well, well. Sorry I don't interest you." He nodded to Avery and went out.

Avery looked at Lomas with some concern. "That's all right," Lomas laughed. "Wonderful fellow. But he will see things that aren't there."

"I wish he'd been more interested in that death in the Gardens," said Avery sadly.

"Too ordinary, my dear fellow, too ordinary for Mr. Fortune."

"This kitten business rather put me off." Avery was thoughtful. "I suppose we ought to have seen the little girl."

"Good gad!" said Lomas. "You run along home and have a nice quiet night. I don't want my inspectors seeing things."

But Inspector Avery did not go home. He had a conscience. He went back to the police station of his division.

Mr. Fortune also has an active conscience. He went to Elector's Gate. It is maintained by Superintendent Bell and others of his devoted admirers that he has a queer power of divining the people behind facts, a sort of sixth sense. At this he would jeer. His own account of himself is that he is so ordinary anything which isn't ordinary disturbs him. From the first he felt the vanishing of the kitten was queer. But the only credit he takes for the case, which they call one of his best, is that he brought to it a perfectly open mind. The rest was merely obedience to the rule of scientific inquiry, that one ought to try everything.

What there was to try in Elector's Gate, he had no notion. He left his car by the park and strolled down that majestically Victorian street. The range of stucco fronts was broken on one side by an opening which led to a dead wall. In this recess two little red brick houses faced each other, neat and prim, hiding behind the solemn mansions of the rest of Elector's Gate. At one corner of the opening stood Mrs. Pemberton's house. Then Miss Cabot's next door—Miss Cabot's was that little house behind it in the recess. Reggie rubbed his chin.

So Miss Cabot did not live in the way suggested by an address in Elector's Gate. Quite a small place, a one or two servant house. Nice and quiet too. No traffic. No neighbors on one side. Retiring folk, the Cabots.

Reggie rang Mrs. Pemberton's bell. He had hardly been shown into her dowdy comfortable drawing-room when she hurried in crying: "Dear Mr. Fortune! But how good of you! Have you found out anything?"

"No. I came to see what I could find here."

"Oh, but I'm so glad! Such a queer thing has happened. Let me show you." She led him away into a little sitting-room and took from a drawer in the writing-table a piece of coarse blue paper. "Look! When I came back from you that was lying in the garden."

Reggie laid it on the table. It was a queer shape, it had a rough black line round the edges.

"You see. It's meant for a kitten!"

"Yes. It's meant for a kitten," said Reggie gravely. "Somebody drew a kitten on packing paper—with a piece of coal—and then tore the paper along the line—so as to make a paper kitten. Somebody who's not very old." He shivered a little. "Has your little granddaughter seen it?"

"No, Vivian was out when we found it. She has gone to a party. I was rather glad, you know. It seemed mean to tease her."

Reggie folded the paper and put it in his pocket-book. His round face was pale and angry.

"Oh, did you want to talk to her about it?" Mrs. Pemberton fluttered.

"I don't want anyone to talk to her about it."

"I'm so glad. Vivian is only six, you see, and—"

"And nobody but Vivian has ever seen the little girl next door?"

"Why no. I never thought of it like that. No, indeed. We didn't know there was a little girl. Oh, but Mr. Fortune, I'm sure there was if Vivian said so."

"Did Vivian notice what she was like?"

"Poor child, she was so distressed," Mrs. Pemberton

apologized for her. "She said it was a nasty, dirty little girl. Children will talk like that, you know, when they're upset. It doesn't mean anything."

Reggie did not answer. He walked to the window. Mrs. Pemberton's garden was a pleasant place of crazy paving and rock plants. The little house next door had a bare, paved yard.

"Oh, wouldn't you like to go out?" Mrs. Pemberton cried. "I could show you just where the paper fell."

"No, I won't go out." Reggie turned away. "Good-by, Mrs. Pemberton. Don't let anyone talk to anybody. Don't let anybody know who I am. Don't let Vivian think about the business."

"Mr. Fortune! You mean there's something dreadful?"

"The worst of it for Vivian is that she's lost a kitten. There's nothing else to trouble you."

"But you're troubled about something."

"Yes, that's what I'm for," said Mr. Fortune. "Good-by."

It was an hour which Lomas is wont to give to his club. He was before the smoking-room fire, he was pronouncing the doom of the last new play, when Reggie looked round the door, caught his eye and vanished. Lomas went after him at leisure. He was in the hall, tapping an impatient foot. "My dear fellow, what's the matter? Has the kitten had foul play?"

"Come on," said Reggie.

Lomas came on with his usual studied jauntiness, to be thrust into a car and driven away at Reggie's side. "Why this stealthy haste, Reginald?" he protested. "Why thus abduct my blameless youth? Miserable man, where are you taking me?"

Mr. Fortune was not amused. "We're going to Avery's damned police station," he said. He spread out on his knee the blue paper. "That's why."

"Good gad!" Lomas groaned. "A kitten! An infant's effort at creating a kitten. Oh, my dear Reginald!"

"Yes. An infant's effort at creating a kitten," Reggie

repeated. "Exactly that. That's what frightened me. It was flung over into Mrs. Pemberton's garden this afternoon."

"Tut, tut. Not quite nice. Designed, I fear, to harrow the feelings of the bereaved."

Reggie drew a long breath. "Do you mind not being funny?" he said in a low voice. "I'm scared."

"My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow! What on earth for?"

"For the child who made that." Reggie put it away again. "My God, don't you feel it? There's something devilish in that little house."

Lomas was shaken. Strong language is very rare on the lips of Reggie Fortune. "I can't say I feel anything," he said slowly. "What do you want to do?"

"See Avery about the people. Here we are."

Inspector Avery was still at the station. Inspector Avery showed no surprise at seeing them. "I told you to go home, young fellow," said Lomas.

"Yes, sir. I know. I was a bit worried about that kitten case."

"Oh, you were, were you? Mr. Fortune's got it very bad."

Avery's keen face turned to Reggie. "About the little girl, sir?" he said eagerly.

"Yes, yes. What do you know about the little girl?"

"Nobody knows anything. That's just it. It don't look right to my mind."

"No. It isn't right," said Reggie. "Send two men to watch the house."

"I've put one there, sir."

"The deuce you have!" Lomas exclaimed.

"Good. But we'll have two, please. One to follow if the child's taken away. One to stand by whatever happens. The constable on the beat must keep in touch with them."

"Right, sir. Just a moment." Avery went out with visible satisfaction to give the orders.

"You won't mind me, will you?" said the Chief of the

Criminal Investigation Department with some bitterness. "But aren't you going rather fast, Fortune?"

"No. We're going far too slow."

"I can't let you commit the police to anything, you know."

"I know. You like a crime finished before you begin. Mr. Lomas, his theory of police work. Well, I've committed you to watching a suspected house. Ever heard of that being done before?"

Lomas, however, kept his temper. "You can have it watched, if it amuses you. But there's no reasonable ground for suspicion."

"Oh my aunt!" Reggie murmured.

Avery bustled in. "I've got that done, sir. Now is there anything else?"

"Yes, I'm not satisfied there's anything in it," said Lomas sharply. "What have you got against these people, Avery?"

"Mr. Lomas touches the spot," Reggie nodded. "Who are these people, Avery?"

"Ah, that's what I'd like to know," said Inspector Avery with relish. "Very retiring people, sir. Kind of secluded."

"Retiring be hanged," Lomas cried. "You've nothing against them but this stuff about a kitten and a girl."

"Pretty queer stuff, isn't it, sir? Girl is seen taking a kitten, owner of the kitten is told nobody there saw it, we're told the girl did see it, like I said. But there's more to it than that. Nobody round there knew there was a little girl in that house, nobody's ever seen her, nobody's heard of her."

"Why should they?"

"Ever lived next door to a house with a child, Lomas?" said Reggie wearily. "You notice it. But Mrs. Pemberton lives next door and she didn't know there was a child in that house."

"Nobody knew. They won't hardly believe it," said Avery.

"How the deuce can you tell?"

Avery smiled. "The men get to know the servants in their beats, sir. I've had some inquiries made. That house, there's Miss Cabot, handsome lady not so young as she was, and her father and an old married couple o' servants very stand-offish. Been there a dozen years, living very quiet, never any guests and as for a child—well, the servants in Elector's Gate laugh at it. If there is a child, they keep her in the cupboard, one of 'em said. But there is, Miss Cabot owned up to her."

"There was a child," said Reggie gravely, and took out the blue paper kitten.

Inspector Avery gasped at it. "Kind of uncanny, sir." He puzzled over it. "I don't know what to make of it, sir."

"There was a child in that little house wanted to create a kitten. She only had packing paper, she only had a bit of coal to draw with, she had no scissors to cut it out. This was the best she could do. She wanted to tell that other child next door something about her kitten. She threw this over the wall."

"I don't like it, sir."

"What's it all come to?" Lomas cried. "There's a lonely child playing tricks."

Reggie turned on him. "There is a child in that little house living a queer life. And the only paper she can get hold of came off a parcel. It happened to be a parcel of scientific apparatus."

"Are you sure about that, sir?" Avery cried eagerly.

"This is the sort of stuff they always use for glass." Reggie fingered it. "Look at the scrap of a label: 'ette & Co.' That's Burette's. First-class firm. What are the Cabots doing in that little house that they want glass from Burette's and keep a child shut up and squalid and miserable?"

"Squalid?" Lomas took up the word.

"The Pemberton child saw her. She was dirty."

"The house is kept is clean as a pin, they say," Avery frowned.

"Yes. Quite clean. And the hidden child is nasty and dirty."

"And they're at some scientific work. Do you think they're doing experiments on the child, sir?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything. But I'm frightened."

"We've got 'em all right, whatever their game is," Avery said fiercely.

"And the child?" Reggie murmured.

Lomas stood up. "You win," he said. "Sorry, Reginald. My error. Well, I haven't wasted much time. We'll go through with it now. First points to work on, who are the Cabots and what is it that Burette's send them? They're to be watched wherever they go, Avery—and their servants. I'll put Bell on to the case to-night. Report to him. We can deal with Burette's in half an hour in the morning. Anything else, Reginald?"

"Yes. You might find out if anybody lost a little girl some time ago."

Lomas shrugged. "We can look up the records. Rather an off-chance, isn't it? Whoever she is, they'd get hold of her quietly, these quiet people."

"Oh, it isn't ordinary kidnapping," Reggie said wearily. "I say, Avery, for God's sake don't let the Cabots know they're being watched. They might do the child in to-night."

"Good Lord, sir! No, I don't think it. If they know they're watched they'd know they couldn't get away with a murder."

"We might not be able to prove murder. He's a man of science, Mr. Cabot is. Warn your men to be careful."

"We can't have a search-warrant on this evidence." Lomas frowned. "We can't do anything to-night. Begad, I'll have somebody get into the house in the morning."

"Yes, I'm going," said Reggie.

"My dear fellow!"

"You want a doctor to see that child."

That night lives in the memory of Mr. Fortune. He could not sleep. It is a condition otherwise unknown to him. He drove early to Scotland Yard and found Superintendent Bell fresh and hearty from a night watch.

"You've got something, Mr. Fortune. They're queer folk, these Cabots. Where do you think they went last night? Night club, if you please. The Doodah Club. Yes, the old man and the woman living in that quiet style, they go off to the Doodah which is about as hot as we've got. Well, as soon as I heard they were there, I sent round one of the night club experts. He knew the Cabots by sight right enough. They're pretty regular at the Doodah. He made out that Cabot is known there as Smithson and runs some sort of an accountant's business in Soho. Nothing on our books against him. But we're looking into Smithson & Co., of course."

"Yes. Have you found anything about a lost child?"

Bell shook his head. "We've got no record of any to fit this little girl. Not many children get lost nowadays. I'm still looking about. But it's a bit of a long shot, sir."

"I know. And Burette's?"

"Harland's on that, sir. We'll know all about their end of the business before lunch."

"Now who's going with me to the house? I want some fellow with a nerve and lots of chat."

Superintendent Bell looked at him with solicitude. "Are you set on going yourself, sir? If you don't mind my saying so—"

"I do," Reggie smiled.

"Well, I knew you would," Bell sighed. "You can't do better than Avery, sir. He's a little bull-terrier."

"Yes. I thought that myself. But is he chatty?"

"He can keep it up. He's a politician."

"Oh my aunt!" said Reggie.

Some time later two men in the uniform of the inspectors of the Metropolitan Water Board strolled into Elector's Gate. A street sweeper asked one of them for a match and over his cigarette remarked: "All out but the woman servant. Cabot and Miss Cabot went off together. The man servant's gone to the pub."

The water inspectors strolled on. "That's a bit of luck, sir," said Avery.

"No. That's Bell making a fuss down at Smithson & Co. I thought he would draw 'em. Your fellows said the man-servant was in the pub till it closed. I thought he'd be on the doorstep when it opened—if master was out of the way. Now then. Lots of patter, please."

Avery rang the tradesmen's bell of the little house. After some minutes the side door opened to display a gaunt woman in black who scowled. Avery was sorry to trouble her, but they were going over the water fittings. She objected. Avery was very sorry, regular inspection, must go through with it, the law was the law. "Constable over there, mum, go and ask him if you like." They were admitted. "All the taps, please, then the run of the pipes, then the cistern. All fittings. Now then, where's the main?" He listened professionally. "Ah, I thought so. Just have a look at the scullery, mate. Now, mum, upstairs if you please." He swept her on before him, still talking about water and the law.

Reggie went into the kitchen, crossed to the scullery and turned on taps so that a noise of splashing water arose and came back to the kitchen. He called out, "Taps running, mate," and was answered: "Right-o! Stand by the main," and heard Avery in continuous eloquence and the servant grumbling. He went swiftly from room to room, such rooms as upholsterers furnish to their own taste, and saw no child's gear nor any mark that a child would make. He could hear Avery moving about upstairs arguing about the lead of pipes and having doors opened. Avery was not missing anything. "Hallo, mate!" Avery called. "Try the main tap. Now up to the cistern if you please, mum." Talking, he climbed.

Reggie stood in the hall. There was a cupboard under the stairs. He opened that, saw darkness and in darkness the gleam of eyes. He went in. "My dear," he said gently. "What's your name?"

There was no answer but panting breath.

He switched on an electric torch and saw a little girl cowering in the corner. Her face was pinched and dirty,

she seemed to have no body so she was huddled shrinking from him.

"I'm friends," said Reggie and reached for her hand. "It's all right." His fingers moved along the lean bare arm, about her neck. "Where's the kitten?"

Her face shook. "It died. It did. It's in the dust," she gasped.

"I'm friends," Reggie said again. "Wait: just wait. It's all right."

He shut off the torch and slipped out of the cupboard. The feet of Avery were heavy on the stair.

"I say, mate. Waste pipes at the back," Reggie called.

"Have a look at 'em, Bill. Have a look at 'em," said Avery and held the gaunt woman in conversation in the hall.

Reggie went out to the paved yard. While he watched the scullery window his arm slid into the dustbin and brought out a bass basket. He buttoned that into his jacket and came back calling, "That's all right, mate. Shall I shut off the taps?"

"Shut 'em off, Bill. Come on. Good day, mum. Sorry to trouble you. Duty is duty."

The gaunt woman grumbling about a lot of fuss and nonsense slammed the door on them.

A chauffeur came out of the bonnet of his car as they passed him. "Watch it. Watch it," Avery muttered and hurried on. It was hard work to keep up with Reggie.

He made for a post office and telling Avery to get a taxi shut himself into the telephone box. "Superintendent Bell? Fortune speaking. What have you got about the Cabots? Somebody interviewing them at the Smithson & Co. Office? Let him keep 'em busy. Child in the house in danger of foul play. Yes. Death. Instant danger. I want a search-warrant quick. Right. At my house." He joined Avery in the taxi and they drove away.

"No sign of the child, sir," Avery began. "But there was—"

"I saw the child," said Reggie. "She's still alive. I got

the kitten too. He isn't." The bass basket was produced and from it the stiff cold body of a Persian kitten.

"Dead, eh? Looks all right too. Did it die natural, sir?"

Reggie pointed to the eyes. "No. Not natural. There isn't much natural in that house." He shivered.

"What did they want to kill it for?"

"What do they want to keep the child in a dark cupboard for?"

"Had her there when we came, I reckon."

"Yes. She's out sometimes. But she's used to the dark."

"The devils," said Avery heartily. "But what is the game, sir? Scientific experiments? There was a room I couldn't get into. The woman said the master had the key. But I made out it had water laid on."

"Yes. Laboratories have." The taxi turned into Wimpole Street and stopped. "You go on to the Yard and see Bell. I've got to look into the kitten." But he went first to the telephone and talked to his hospital and asked for a certain nurse.

He was in his own clothes again; he was eating lunch without appetite when Bell came. "Got the warrant?" He started up. "Good. Where are the Cabots?"

"I couldn't say for the moment, sir. Our fellows had orders to keep 'em talking as long as they could. But there wasn't anything much to go on. That business looks all right. They do accountants' work for the foreign restaurants."

"The man who died in Kensington Gardens," Reggie murmured.

"Good Lord, sir!" Bell stared. "He was in the restaurant trade, sure enough. And he was a drug fiend, you said."

"Come on, come on. I want to get back to that child before the Cabots."

But as soon as the car was moving Bell returned to his point. "About the drugs, sir. What did you make of the house this morning? Avery said there was a room might be

a laboratory. Burette's say they've been supplying Mr. Cabot with laboratory glassware for years."

"Yes. I think we shall find a laboratory. The kitten has been drugged. The little girl has been drugged."

"What's their game, sir? Some kind of scientific experiments with drugs?"

Reggie shuddered. "They've been making experiments. Not for science. For the devil. They killed the kitten because she liked it. And she made her paper kitten to tell the other little girl it was gone. Silly, isn't it?" He laughed nervously. "This car's damned slow, Bell."

"We're almost there, sir."

"Almost! Nice word, almost! My God!"

"Steady, sir, steady." Bell laid an anxious hand on his arm. "I want you, you know. I'll ask for the child first."

The car swung into Elector's Gate and stopped just short of the recess in which the little house stood. As Bell sprang out a large man on the pavement met him. "Both of 'em drove straight here from the office, sir. Only just gone in."

Bell strode on to the house and rang and rang again. It was some while before the door moved. Then it opened only a little way and a man's flabby face with watery eyes looked around it. "I am a police officer. I have a warrant to enter this house." Bell pushed the door back and went in with Reggie and on their heels two large men followed. Silent and adroit they took the manservant and put him into the street where careful hands received him, and shut the door.

Bell stood still in the hall listening. There was a murmur of voices in one of the rooms. Its door opened. The gaunt woman came out. "Well?" she said defiantly. "Who may you be?"

The large man swept her aside. Bell and Reggie went into the room.

Two people were in it. A plump old man, neatly professional in his clothes, with a large brown face under his white hair, the face of a clever fellow who enjoyed his life, a woman darker than he, black-haired, black-browed.

a woman on a large scale who might have been handsome before she was full-blown. She looked at them with gleaming eyes, and the lines were deep about her big mouth. She laughed, a shrill sound that began suddenly and suddenly ended.

"What is all this, gentlemen?" the man said.

"Mr. and Miss Cabot, alias Smithson?" Bell inquired.

"My name is Cabot and this is my daughter. The name of my firm is Smithson & Co. But you have the advantage of me."

"I am Superintendent Bell. I have a warrant to search your house."

"Very good of the police to take this interest in me. May I ask why?"

"I want the child you have here."

Mr. Cabot looked at his daughter. "Oh, our poor little darling," he said slowly.

"What's her name?" Bell snapped.

"I beg your pardon?" Mr. Cabot suddenly became aware of him. "Her name? Why, Grace of course."

"Grace of course?"

"Grace Cabot, sir. I see that you don't know our family tragedy. My poor son's child is mentally defective. Practically imbecile. It has—"

"Since she came here or before?"

Mr. Cabot licked his lips. "I see that you have picked up some scandal. She was—"

"Where is she?"

"Oh, I'll find her for you," Miss Cabot cried.

But Reggie was at the door first. He went before her into the hall. Miss Cabot followed him and calling "Grace, Grace," ran upstairs.

A moment he stood, then pointed and one of the large men went heavily after her. Reggie moved to the cupboard under the stairs and unlocked it and looked into the dark. "I'm friends," he said very gently. "Come, dear. I'm friends" And above Miss Cabot's shrill voice called "Grace! Grace!"

He could see something faintly white. He heard a

moan. "It's all over now," he said. "All right now. Friends, just friends."

"Grace! Grace!" the shrill voice came nearer.

"No, no, no," the child sobbed in the dark.

Reggie went in, groped for her and gathered her into his arms. She was very frail. "My dear," he whispered. She was carried out into the light, shaking, trying to hide her dirty dress.

Miss Cabot ran down the stairs, "So you've found the dear creature!" she cried. Her arms shot out.

Reggie swung on his heel, offering her a solid shoulder. "Hold her wrist," he said.

The large man behind her had both arms in a grip that brought a scream out of her. A syringe fell tinkling to the floor. And Miss Cabot began to swear.

"Take the child out of this," Reggie said fiercely. "Take her to my place." But she nestled up against him and moaned. "All right. All right. Get the woman off." Handcuffs snapped upon Miss Cabot's wrists while she bit and struggled and blasphemed. She was thrust out to the ready hands in the street.

"A beauty, she is," one of the large men muttered.

And then silence came down upon the house. The child felt it, raised her wan starved face from Reggie's shoulder. "Is she gone?" she murmured, looked about her, saw nothing but those solid, comfortable men and listened again to the silence. "Weally, weally gone?"

"Really gone. She'll never hurt you any more," Reggie said. "There's only friends for you now. You're coming home with me. Nice home. But just wait a minute. This man will hold you quite safe." He persuaded her to go to the arms of one of the detectives. "Take her out into the air at the back. I shan't be long, dear."

He picked up the syringe carefully, he turned into the room where Bell watched Cabot. The old man stood by the window looking out. His face was yellow. But he had control of his nerves and his voice. "Perhaps you will tell me what all this means, superintendent?" he was saying.

"You'll hear what it means all right," Bell growled.

"I see my daughter arrested—"

"Yes. She didn't like it, did she?" Reggie spoke to hurt. The old man swung round. "Who is this person, pray?"

"That's Mr. Fortune."

"Oh, the great Mr. Fortune! Why trouble him with our poor affairs?"

"A pleasure," said Reggie.

"So happy to interest you! And will you be good enough to t[illegible] have arrested my daughter?"

"We [illegible] a child in your house who has been tortured."

"I suppose she told you so," the old man chuckled. "Good evidence you have found, Mr. Fortune. The child's an imbecile."

"We shan't use her evidence," said Reggie. "You won't torture her any more, Mr. Cabot."

The old man grinned. "Is the child dead, sir?" Bell cried.

Reggie did not answer for a moment. He was watching the old man's face. "No," he said slowly. "Oh no. Miss Cabot tried to kill her just now. But it didn't happen."

The old man was breathing hard. "A poor story, isn't it?" he sneered. "You won't make much of it in court, Mr. Fortune. Is that all, pray?"

"No. I should like to see your laboratory."

"My laboratory? Oh, that's too kind of you! A very humble little place where I play with chemical experiments. Do you really want to see it?"

"We're going to see it," said Bell.

"But I shall be delighted to show you."

Bell looked at Reggie who nodded. The old man went upstairs between them. He unlocked a door and they came into a room fitted with a long bench and shelves and sink and much chemical apparatus. Reggie moved to and fro looking at the array of bottles, opening cupboards. There were many things which interested him.

"Ah, do you like that?" The old man came forward as he lingered by an arrangement of flasks and glass tubes. "It's a method of my own." He became technical, skilled fingers moved demonstrating. "And here,"—he turned

away and opened a drawer and bent over it,—"here you see—"

"Yes. I see," said Reggie and caught the hand that was going to his mouth.

Bell took the old man in his solid grip. The hand was opened and produced a white pellet.

"Not that way, Mr. Cabot," said Reggie. "Not yet."

"You go where your daughter's gone." said Bell and called to the detective in the hall.

"I shall have some things to think of, gentlemen," the old man grinned as he was led away.

"You will. And plenty of time to think. In this world and the next," said Bell fiercely.

The old man laughed.

Reggie and Bell looked at each other and Reggie shivered and "Thank God," he said. He went to the window and leaned out to see the child with the big detective in the free air below.

"What was it the old scoundrel was doing here, sir? Kind of vivisecting the child?"

"Oh no, no. The little girl was a side line. He was making narcotic drugs—dope. Very neat plant."

"Turning out dope? He's been doing that for years?"

"Yes, yes. Prosperous industry."

"But why the child? For testing the drugs?"

"No. He wouldn't need her for tests. No. They drugged her for fun. You haven't got to the child's story yet. Lots of work to do yet."

"What did you want me to work on, sir?"

"Go over this place. Go over the Cabots' past. Go and look for somebody that's lost a child. Good-by."

The big detective in the yard, nursing the little girl with awkward gentleness, grinned embarrassment at Reggie. "I'm not much of a hand at this, sir. But she don't seem to like me to put her down."

"No. Nice to have somebody to hold on to, isn't it, shrimp?" Reggie touched her cheek. "Come and hold on to me." He held out his arms. For the first time he saw something like a smile on that pinched face. She swayed

towards him. "Come along. We're going to a pretty house and a kind jolly lady and everybody there is waiting to love you."

She was wrapped in a rug in Superintendent Bell's car, she sat on Reggie's knee watching the trees in the park rush by, the busy, gay streets. Suddenly she clutched at him. "Is it weal?" she cried. "Weally weal?"

"Yes. It's all real now," Reggie said and put his hand over hers. "Jolly things, real things."

When the car stopped at his house, his parlor maid had the door open before he reached it and watched him carry the child in with benign amusement which yielded to pity. "Shall I take her, sir?" she said eagerly.

"She's all right, thanks. Has Nurse Cary come?"

"Here I am, Mr. Fortune," a small buxom woman ran down the stairs. "Well!" She looked at the child. "I'm going to like you ever so much. Please like me."

It was difficult not to like those pretty pink and white cheeks, that kind voice. Again something like a smile came on the pinched, wan face.

"Oh, my dear," said Nurse Cary with tears in her voice and her eyes. She gave a glance at Mr. Fortune.

"Yes. I know," he said quickly.

"I'm going to make you so beautifully cozy," said Nurse Cary. "You just come and try." She took the child to her comfortable bosom.

Upstairs in the bathroom filthy clothes were stripped from the starved little body. But it was marked with something worse than dirt, punctured marks on the arms and here and there a rash. Nurse Cary looked at Mr. Fortune.

"Yes, I know," he said softly. "They're been giving her drugs."

"But why?"

"For fun."

"Devils," said Nurse Cary under her breath.

"Yes, I think so," said Mr. Fortune. He was handling the filthy clothes. They had been good honest stuff once. He looked close, made out a bit of tape with a name in

stitched letters—Rose Harford. He turned to the child lying in the steaming water, Nurse Cary's hands busy upon her. "Well, isn't it jolly, Rose?"

"So you're Rose, are you?" Nurse Cary smiled. "My little Rose."

"Mummy's Wose," the child murmured.

Mr. Fortune went out. The telephone called to Scotland Yard. "Is that Lomas? Fortune speaking. The child is Rose Harford. There's a mother—or was. Get on to it."

. . . . . .

The small Rose in golden pyjamas was among many pillows watching Mr. Fortune and Nurse Cary set out a farm on her bed. They were being very funny about the hens, but she did not laugh; she watched with grave, tranquil eyes and sometimes stroked her beautiful pyjamas. Mr. Fortune was called away.

At Scotland Yard he found a conference, Lomas, Bell, Avery. "My dear fellow! How's the patient?"

"She'll come through with luck. But it's a long job. They've made a vile mess of her."

"Hanging's too good for that pair," Bell sighed. "And we can't even hang 'em."

"No, no. I hope not. They'll feel what they get, quite a lot, the family Cabot."

"They've done enough to be hanged more than once," said Avery fiercely. "You remember that fellow who died in Kensington Gardens, Mr. Fortune? He used to get his drugs from Smithson & Co."

"Yes. You were right about him, Avery. I ought to have seen there was something to work on there."

Avery laughed. "You're the one that's been right, sir. Do you remember how we made fun of you about the kitten? If you hadn't taken that up, the Cabots would be playing at hell now quite happy and comfortable."

"Don't recall my awful past, Avery," Lomas said. "It's not respectful. My dear Reginald, you're a disturbing fellow. You're sapping the foundations of the criminal courts of this country."

"No flowers, by request," Reggie murmured.

"You don't work by evidence, like a reasonable man."

"My only aunt!" Reggie was annoyed. "I use nothing but evidence. That's why I don't get on with lawyers and policemen. I believe evidence, Lomas, old thing. That's what bothers you."

"You do bother me. And now will you kindly tell me the whole history of the Cabot affair?"

"Quite clear, isn't it? Cabot was a skilled chemist. The trouble in the dope trade is always to get supplies. He solved that by getting raw materials and making the stuff. He found his customers at the night clubs and the restaurants he was in touch with through the Smithson & Co. accountant business. He distributed probably by post from Smithson & Co."

"That's right, sir," Bell nodded. "We've got on the track of that now. Big trade he did. Lots of poor fools he must have sent to the devil."

"Very neat, Reginald," Lomas smiled. "You omit to explain the little girl."

"Oh, that's revenge. Revenge on somebody. Probably her father and mother."

"Did you get that out of the child?" said Lomas quickly.

"No. The child mustn't be asked anything about the past. Haven't you got that clear? No evidence from her. She mustn't come into court."

"My dear fellow, we don't want her. There's two of you to swear to attempted murder and your medical evidence. That's all right. I only wanted to know how you arrived at the mother."

"Have you found her at last?"

"Three months ago George and Rose Harford were convicted of dealing in drugs. The man is a young accountant, the woman an actress. They lived in a Bloomsbury flat and often went to one of the Soho restaurants. A waiter there gave information that the woman had been offering drugs. They were arrested. Dope was found in the pockets of the man's coat and the woman's cloak.

More dope in their flat. A clear case and they were both convicted. Some time after they were in prison the woman complained that she had heard nothing of her daughter, whom another actress in the flats had promised to look after. Well, the prison people had inquiries made for her. It took time. The actress had gone on tour. When they found her, her story was that Mrs. Harford's sister had called and taken the child away. The prison authorities told Mrs. Harford and she said she had no sister extant. So at last it worked round to us."

"Yes. At last. And you've had the mother in jail three months—wondering."

"Wondering if there was a God," said Bell solemnly.

"Well—it's a black business," Lomas shrugged. "See your way, Reginald?"

"Oh, I suppose the Cabot woman wanted George Harford herself. When he married, she looked for a chance to make the wife suffer. She bided her time. And sent father and mother to prison and took the child and tortured her. Patient woman."

"The Harfords have been out of England. The man had a job for his firm in France. They hadn't been back before this happened to them."

"What evidence have you got?"

"That drunken dog of a manservant wants to turn King's evidence. He says he was under the thumb of his wife—"

"I dare say he was. Have you seen her? Born brute."

"His story is that his wife was turned on to plant the dope in the Harford flat. The waiter put the stuff in their coat pockets while they were at dinner. We can't lay our hands on the waiter. Several people have vanished since the Cabots were taken. George Harford says he knew Miss Cabot at a night club, never knew her well, just danced with her. His wife had never seen her. Both of them always declared they knew nothing of the dope."

"Yes. Gross miscarriage of justice, Lomas."

"Clear case," Loman shrugged. "Nobody's fault."

"Yes. That's very gratifying. Great consolation for the Harfords. Cheering for the child."

"We'll do all we can, of course. Put 'em right before the world, set 'em on their feet again and all that. An unfortunate affair. Shakes confidence in police work."

Mr. Fortune stared at him. Mr. Fortune dreaw a long breath. "Yes. That is one way of looking at it," he murmured.

"Thank God for the kitten, sir," Bell said.

Mr. Fortune turned large grave eyes on him. "Yes, that's another," he said.

"I'd call it all providential," Bell said earnestly. "Just providential."

Wonder grew in Mr. Fortune's eyes. "Providential!" he said. "Well, well."

# H. C. BAILEY

## THE HERMIT CRAB

ONCE upon a time, Mrs. Fortune, irritated by the sight of her husband lying on his back and thinking beautiful thoughts asked him if he had ever done any work in his life. Reggie Fortune replied with dignity that he would be eternally honoured among the great benefactors of humanity for his work in the case of the hermit crab; he opened his eyes and smiled. "That is, perhaps, my masterpiece, Joan," said he.

Mrs. Fortune showed him the tip of a red tongue. "Mormon!" said she.

Yet it began innocently enough. It began, as Mrs. Fortune complains, soon after they were married. The Hon. Sidney Lomas, Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, came in to a lazy Sunday lunch, and contemplating Mrs. Fortune with artistic approval, congratulated Mr. Fortune on his knowledge of women.

"I haven't. I don't," Reggie Fortune protested. "I don't know anything about women. But I don't act as if I did. That is how I am wiser than all other men."

The Hon. Sidney Lomas shook his head. "These experts!" he sighed. "They never will tell you how they do the trick, will they, Mrs. Fortune? This profession of innocence is irritating, Reginald. How did you persuade her to marry you?"

"How did I, Joan?" Mr. Fortune murmured dreamily.

"I always wanted to be a mother to you, my dear," Mrs. Fortune explained to him. "And you were getting so fat."

"He was," Lomas agreed with enthusiasm. "Nay, more,

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he is. Are you sure that you are the right treatment for him? I think what he really needs is something sterner. I should recommend Miss Platt Robinson. Could you arrange for him to marry her, too?"

"If you think it would be for his good, Mr. Lomas," Mrs. Fortune said demurely.

"It would be for mine," Lomas sighed. "But married people are so selfish."

"Who is your lady friend, Lomas? Does she want to be a mother to you?" Mr. Fortune asked.

Lomas shuddered. "Not that! No, only a bore, not a mother. I'm afraid you haven't heard of Miss Platt Robinson, Reginald. She would be annoyed."

"Philanthropist at large, isn't she?"

"At large, unfortunately," Lomas agreed. "She is one of the earnest women who have made England what it is, Mrs. Fortune. She has lately become Superintendent of the Records Department of the Ministry of Social Welfare."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Fortune.

"I gather that isn't what the women in the Records Department call her."

"Her appointment was a shameless job, wasn't it?" Fortune smiled.

"My dear Fortune! There are no jobs in the Civil Service."

"Forgive me," Reggie said meekly. "I do not understand these things."

"Miss Platt Robinson, sir, is one of those noble women who have given their lives to good works. Whenever you hear of a scheme to prevent people doing something and make them do something else, you may be sure Miss Platt Robinson is in it up to the neck. She was born to set everybody right. She had her big chance in the War, of course. She went round lecturing mothers and housewives on the joys of sacrifice. Then she looked after the manners and morals of young women in factories. And when she had won the War, some earnest, wealthy philanthropists felt that the country had to provide for Miss Platt Robinson. So she was pushed into the Records De-

partment of the Ministry of Social Welfare. Hence these tears."

"What do they do there?" Mrs. Fortune asked.

Lomas shook his head. "No one knows. Miles of card indexes and box files and women. A dreadful place. And Miss Platt Robinson superintends."

"Having come in over the heads of all the permanent staff," Fortune murmured. "Do birds in their little nests agree, Lomas?"

"It was feared by some miserable cynics like you that there would be trouble. Old Bligh—he's secretary to the Ministry—said it was the dirtiest work in his chief's corrupt career, and he hoped and believed the women in the Records Department would tear Miss Platt Robinson limb from limb. Some of them have been in the service thirty years. You wouldn't expect them to want an outsider put over their heads. And the woman who should have been made superintendent, Miss Thornton, has worked her way up from the bottom, and I'm told she's fit to run the Empire. They all worship her."

"They ought to have made a rebellion," said Mrs. Fortune.

"I sometimes suspect you are a man, Joan," her husband sighed. "Women are conscientious. Women have a sense of duty."

"They have," Lomas agreed. "They took Miss Platt Robinson to their bosoms. All was peace. Old Bligh was much annoyed: said it convinced him women were unfit for the public service. For months all was peace." He smiled at Mrs. Fortune. "Woman is the most patient of the animals. I don't know how long it would take Miss Platt Robinson to get on a woman's nerves. But she has now begun to receive attention." He took from his pocket-book a small sheet of drawing-paper and gave it to Reggie. "A scene from bird life. Artist unknown."

Mr. Fortune looked at a sketch in water colour. "A young cuckoo ejecting a fledging hedge-sparrow from the maternal nest. Very neat and good."

"I'm not a bird fancier myself, but I grasped the allu-

sion. So did Miss Platt Robinson. She calls it a threatening letter, Reginald."

"Is this the only one?"

"No. The others are not illustrated. She had one which said: 'Did you think you could get away with it? Not so, Platty.' Several of them call her Platty, or Platter. That annoys her particularly. She has had a dozen or so. None of them very long. One said her appointment was the scandal of the century. Another said: 'We must draw the line somewhere, Platty.' That's the general tone. They get more peevish as they go on. So does Miss Platt Robinson. She don't think much of Scotland Yard. She can't understand why we haven't found somebody to hang."

"Why haven't you?" Mr. Fortune murmured.

"My dear fellow, there's three hundred women in the department. All the three hundred may be in it. My fellows tell me she's put everybody's back up. She's been meddling at large—meddled with their luncheon hours, with their catering, with their holidays. Of course, they kick!"

"I wonder," Reggie Fortune murmured. "It's not much in my way, Lomas. I like passion and gore. But there are points——" He looked affectionately at the picture of the cuckoo.

And the next morning found him at Scotland Yard. He was in time to assist at the interview between Mr. Weeley, the hoary old politician who was Minister of Social Welfare, and Lomas. Mr. Weeley came in like a lion. He was much distressed to find that the Criminal Investigation Department had done nothing to clear up this deplorable affair. He was compelled to say—many unpleasant things, and he said them at length.

"Now you've finished, sir," said Lomas placidly, "I've only to add that the staff of your ministry never gave any trouble till you appointed Miss Platt Robinson. However, if you want a criminal case over your appointment, I'll do what I can. I am laying the papers before Mr. Fortune."

"A very interesting case," Reggie smiled.

But Mr. Weeley flinched. The name of Mr. Fortune meant murders to him. "Ah, really? Really? I am quite sure you will do everything that is possible. But the important thing is to settle the matter: to restore confidence and good feeling. We mustn't have any publicity, Mr. Lomas. I realy on you, my dear sir. Absolutely!" He went out like a lamb.

"What a nuisance politicians would be if they weren't all cowards," said Lomas. "Here are the papers, Reginald."

Mr. Fortune examined a dozen letters.

They had no resemblance except in the general style, which was mysterious and humorous. The writer or writers used paper of different kinds, though all were good; the words were in script, or printed in different inks and with different pens. The letters had been posted in different parts of London; most of them in the West End. The general sense of them was that Miss Platt Robinson ought not to be superintendent and would not be superintendent long. But there was no definite threat."

"Anything strike you, Lomas?" Mr. Fortune smiled.

"Nothing to take hold of," Lomas shrugged. "Nothing criminal. Insubordinate, of course, written to the head of the department. Not a police matter."

"I wonder," Mr. Fortune said. "You know, there isn't any malice. They're not bitter, and they have humour. Very unusual anonymous letters. I would like to have a few words with Miss Platt Robinson."

Lomas sighed. "She'll have the words, Reginald."

They took a cab to the new gaunt building which is the home of the Records Department. They were led through long corridors of echoing concrete to the severe room, all whitewash and white paint, where on an island of carpet in the middle of a vast bare floor were the table and the chair of Miss Platt Robinson.

Pictures of Joan of Arc and Florence Nightingale looked down upon her. She stood up between them, a large, plump woman in a dark coat-frock. She had an extensive face, in which the eyes and the mouth stood

out, an earnest, voluble face very pleased with itself. And she began to talk. She was glad to see Mr. Lomas. She felt it extraordinary that there had been so much delay in dealing with the case. She wished to remind Mr. Lomas that she had to think not only of herself but of the women committed to her care. Attacks upon her she might afford to treat (as she did) with contempt, but it was too plain that their gross nature, their repetition, must have a deplorable influence upon the morale of the women on her staff. It was amazing to her——

"Have you told the women here all about the letters?" Lomas broke in.

Miss Platt Robinson said contemptuously that her secretary of course opened her letters.

"And you don't trust your secretary?"

"I trust everyone, Mr. Lomas. It is one of my principles. But I suppose you have some knowledge of the world. You should be aware that such things cannot be kept secret."

"If my secretary couldn't keep secrets I shouldn't keep him," Lomas said.

Miss Platt Robinson said that she was not inclined to discharge a trusted woman on a vague suspicion. She was surprised to receive such advice.

"We're not advising," said Reggie meekly. "We're asking questions. Do you suspect anyone?"

"I do not allow myself to suspect, sir. It is one of my principles."

"And very grateful and comfortin'," Mr. Fortune murmured. "But somebody painted the cuckoo. What is your theory, Miss Platt Robinson? Why did you get the bird?"

"I am convinced, sir, that we have to deal with an attempt to undermine my authority in the department."

"By whom?"

"I am not a detective, sir. It is not possible for me to watch and investigate and obtain evidence. The case has been referred to your department, and I must leave it in your hands. I never meddle. That is one of my principles."

Mr. Fortune lay back and smiled at the picture of Joan of Arc. "Thank you so much. I do like a free hand," he murmured.

Miss Platt Robinson made an impatient noise. "But I really must point out, sir, that your handling of the affair has been deplorably feeble. The attacks are being continued. Only this morning I had an outrageous thing." She opened a drawer in her table and drew out a parcel. "Kindly examine that."

Mr. Fortune looked at the address. It was in printed letters. The parcel had been posted in West London. It was made up of a tin box, which was packed with seaweed. From this he drew forth a large whelk-shell. Out of the shell protruded the front claws of a crab.

"Good Gad!" said Lomas. "What is the meaning of that, madame?"

"I wonder how you can ask me!" Miss Platt Robinson cried.

Reggie had laid down the shell and the crab. He was poking a curious finger inside the box into the seaweed which contained little lumps of red sand and shell.

"What is the thing, Fortune?" Lomas said.

Reggie looked up. His round, cherubic face was solemn.

"What? This gentleman?" He lifted the whelk-shell. "Oh, he's *pagurus Bernhardus*. A hermit crab."

"Why should the creature be sent to me?" said Miss Platt Robinson.

"The hermit crab, madame, in the inscrutable wisdom of Providence, is given a naked and tender abdomen. He is, therefore, tempted to shelter it in other people's property. He evicts the whelk and finds a safe and comfortable situation. Here you see him."

Lomas smiled. "So this is a variation on the theme of the cuckoo."

"I fear so." Reggie shook his head. "I fear so." He put the hermit crab back into the seaweed and carefully packed it up again.

"This is positively outrageous!" said Miss Platt Robinson.

Into the room came a small brisk woman. "I think you had better read these—oh, I beg your pardon. I will bring them when you're free." She was gone again. It seemed to Reggie Fortune that the frown which Miss Platt Robinson sent after her had a certain acidity.

"Well, well," he said. "And not one of these queer things has suggested to you any particular person who don't like you?"

The prominent eyes of Miss Platt Robinson stared at him. Miss Platt Robinson seemed to struggle with emotions. "It must be some one who has lost all sense of decency," she exploded. "Jealousy, I suppose." She burrowed among the papers on her desk.

Mr. Fortune lay back and winked at the picture of Florence Nightingale.

Miss Platt Robinson took up a strip of yellow paper and gazed at it eagerly. "I should advise you to compare that writing with the anonymous letters, sir," she said.

It was a note about the practice of the department. It was in a clear, bold hand.

"And who wrote this, madame?"

Miss Platt Robinson hesitated.

"I should prefer to leave you to draw your own conclusions, sir."

"We will," said Reggie. And he took up the box with the hermit crab. "It's a very interestin' case. Good morning!"

"Interesting!" Miss Platt Robinson gasped.

Outside in the long gaunt corridor Reggie and Lomas were submerged in a flood of young women going to lunch with earnest haste. " 'The female of the species is more dreadful than the male,' " Reggie murmured. "Hold my hand, Lomas, I'm frightened. They look very determined. I'm not good enough to die. What an awful place this is! A labyrinth full of women. Fancy being lost here!"

They emerged at last into sunshine and the street.

"Lunch is strongly indicated," Reggie sighed relief. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

"But why are you so rattled, Reginald?"

"How can you ask? You also were present. Something will come of this. I hope it mayn't be human gore."

"The woman's a fool," said Lomas. "Some humorist's been pulling her leg, that's all there is to it."

"I wonder. Not a nice woman, Lomas. Not really a nice woman."

"Well, I don't mind owning I shouldn't like anybody to send me a dead crab in a whelk-shell. I fear I should be peevish."

"The hermit crab upset her, didn't it? She had suspicions all right after that. Do you know the writing she gave me as a sample?"

"Confound her," said Lomas. "It's her assistant's, Miss Thornton's. She was the little woman who blew in. She's been in the office all her life. She ought to be superintendent now if she had her rights."

"Does she think so?"

"How can she help thinking so?"

"As you say," Reggie nodded. "That writing looks—possible. The anonymous letters are disguise, of course. What's Miss Thornton's reputation?"

"One of the best. Good Gad, I hope she hasn't lost her head. It would be an infernal shame if she's ruined herself over the Platt Robinson."

"Somebody's lost her head." Reggie smiled.

"You can't tell what a woman won't do when she begins to hate another woman," Lomas pronounced. "They all run mad then, even the best of them."

"Yes. Yes. There was some nasty temper about. I wonder."

"Confound you, what do you think of it yourself?"

"I don't think. I haven't enough facts. I only wonder. Very interestin' case. I wonder what they'll be up to next?"

Lomas chuckled. "It won't be easy to beat the hermit crab."

Mr. Fortune possesses the faculty of remaining awake after a large lunch. He spent the afternoon in a scientific investigation of the hermit crab, and the packing, and the

tin. In the evening his wife found him benign but pensive. In the morning she heard with regret that their chauffeur and factotum, Sam, had gone to the seaside for a day or two. Mr. Fortune offered to drive her himself. She shuddered. Reggie Fortune's driving is the triumph of mind over matter.

For some days nothing else disturbed their happiness. Mr. Fortune asking over the telephone whether Miss Platt Robinson had received any more congratulations, was told that she had gone on holiday. Sam the chauffeur came back to his job. And one morning the voice of Lomas spoke over the telephone.

"Reginald, are you there? You are quite sure you are there? You haven't eloped with Miss Platt Robinson?"

"I hadn't noticed it."

"This is very suspicious. Better come around and prove an alibi."

Sam drove Mr. Fortune to Scotland Yard.

"What is this unseemly jest, Lomas? I am a good young husband."

"Anything you say will be used as evidence against you. Now, Reggie, where is she?"

"Oh, my aunt, is she really gone?"

"The vanishing lady. A new illusion by Miss Platt Robinson. This morning Lady Bandicot—do you know Lady Bandicot?" Reggie held up his hands. Lady Bandicot is one of our most earnest social reformers. "Quite so. She came round with her tail fluffed out and her back up. She had a meeting yesterday at which Miss Platt Robinson was to make a speech on the modern woman. Miss Platt Robinson didn't turn up. The evidence is that she left her house early the day before yesterday without luggage. She didn't even say when she was coming back. She hasn't been seen since."

"Well, well," said Reggie Fortune. "And what's Lady Bandicot's view?"

"Lady Bandicot points out that never before in our fair island story did Miss Platt Robinson fail to make a speech when she had the chance. She argues that it was no small

thing which stopped her from making a speech. She suggests that Miss Platt Robinson has been made away with by some wicked enemy of the rights of women, or some disgruntled female in her office."

"It is an interesting case, isn't it?" Mr. Fortune smiled. "And what does the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department make of it?"

"I think it's a case for a medical man, Reginald. I suppose the wretched woman is off her head. Lost her memory, or had a nervous breakdown. Didn't she look like it?"

"I wonder. Where did she live, Lomas?"

Miss Platt Robinson had a new house in a garden suburb. In a room where the paint and curtain glared at each other across angular furniture, which insisted that no man had ever thought of making furniture like it before, Reggie and Lomas conferred with a grim housekeeper. Miss Platt Robinson had said nothing when she went out, but that she would not be in to lunch. She went out alone. She had no one call on her that morning. Lady Flora Norton called the day before.

Reggie, who was playing with the things on the writing-table, looked up.

"An old friend?"

Lady Flora worked under Miss Platt Robinson during the War. She was Lady Flora Holmbury then, of course. Miss Platt Robinson certainly had some letters the morning before she went out. She always had many letters. The housekeeper could not say if there were any friends she was likely to visit. She had many friends.

"Yes, yes. We'll find them in the address book here, no doubt," Reggie said. "Thanks very much. We'll ring when we've finished."

The housekeeper started at this abrupt dismissal, and went out reluctantly.

"What have you got, Reginald?" Lomas came to him.

Mr. Fortune took from the pages of the blotting book an envelope addressed in a bold hand to Miss Platt Robinson.

"Good Gad! Another letter!" Lomas drew out a sheet on which was written "You will not be Superintendent long." "That doesn't seem much to run away from. I suppose there was something more."

Reggie was going over the writing-table. "No, nothing more," he said. "Only that and nothing more. A very interestin' case."

"Some of these drawers are locked."

"Yes. Yes. I don't know how far you're going into Miss Platt Robinson's secrets. I want my lunch."

"I want to know how this letter came here. It didn't come by post."

"No, it didn't come by post," Reggie agreed. "Good-bye."

"Confound you, Fortune. This is serious."

"I know. That's why I'm going. I'm going to lunch with the hermit crab. Good-bye."

To his waiting chauffeur, Mr. Fortune said: "Liverpool Street!"

"Won't the car do it, sir?" Sam smiled.

"You're so romantic, Sam. I want a luncheon-car."

In the afternoon sunshine Mr. Fortune arrived upon the sea-front of Walton-on-the-Naze. The summer was still young, the beach not crowded; though the tide was high only a few bathers disturbed the glittering steel sea. Mr. Fortune walked northwards with a roving eye for them and the little groups that took the air on the promenade. But he saw no one who detained him and when he came to the end of the promenade he strode on northward still, by the path at the edge of the tall green corn above the sea. At the point where the coast opens to make the wide inlet of Harford Water he sat down on a stone groyne and contemplated the landscape.

Only a flock of sheep grazing in the salt meadows and the gleam and call of plovers disturbed the solitude. The tide was rising still but almost full and from the groyne to the grass of the low islands the water shone grey.

"Yes. A soothin' harmony," he murmured. "I like these damsels."

And he rose lazily and went on by the path which runs above the shore between hedges of tamarisk. He saw on one of the islands white tents. When he was as near to it as he could get he came out from the tamarisk and stood by the water. From the island girls were bathing. Mr. Fortune lit a cigar and watched them with artistic approval. They had a boat out. They swam to it, dived, dark lithe shapes curving pleasantly in the sunshine with a gleam of white arms and legs. Mr. Fortune approved—and clapped.

The girl who was steering the boat turned. Another girl climbed into the bows and shaded her eyes to look. Mr. Fortune took off his hat. There was conversation on the sea, heads bobbing up and clustering round the boat and gazing at the intrusive man. Then they vanished into the water like seals, the girl at the tiller bent down, the motor began to throb, and the boat made for Mr. Fortune.

Fifty yards from the shore the engine was stopped.

"What's your trouble?" the girl cried, and she let her boat drift in to stare at him.

"I've come to call," said Fortune.

"At home sixth Mondays," said the girl.

"But I'm sure Miss Platt Robinson would like to see me," said Mr. Fortune meekly.

"Poor you!" she smiled. She had a thin, brown face which became pugnacious when she smiled. "Come on, then!"

Mr. Fortune looked with pathos at the yards of water between him and the boat.

"Be a little man!" she exhorted him. "Nana's watching!" but she brought the boat in nearer. "Baby paddle now?"

Reggie Fortune, though plump, has agility. He ran down the bank and jumped, arriving in the bows of the rocking boat on all fours.

"You owl!" said the girl. "You nearly had her over!"

"Then it would have been my duty and my delight to save your life," Reggie smiled

"Save your grandmother!" said the girl and started her engine.

Mr. Fortune made his way aft to her side. She was clothed in engineer's overalls, from the trousers of which little bare feet came out. She tucked them under her.

"Don't you mind me, Jonah," she said. "You look about for a whale."

The boat made for the island at the rate of ? knots.

"Do you get many whales?" Reggie smiled. "I thought you were catching crabs?"

The girl stared at him. "It's a clever little man, isn't it?" she said.

The island was near. A group of girls, some still in bathing-dresses, some in sweaters and shorts, stood on the beach watching.

"And very picturesque too!" said Mr. Fortune. "But embarrassin', you know. I never had so many ladies take an interest in me all at once."

"Feet cold?" The girl's warlike smile flashed at him. She stopped the engine, and heaved her little anchor over the gunwale. The boat brought up in shallow water.

"Who is your young man, Vi?" a clear voice hailed.

"Little Jonah looking for a whale," the girl said. She was rolling up her trousers. "Come and paddle, ducky. Nana will hold your hand."

Mr. Fortune took off his shoes and socks.

"There's a brave man!" said she, and they splashed together to the beach.

Mr. Fortune, holding his shoes in one hand, took off his hat with the other to a cluster of smiles.

"I hope I don't intrude?" he said, and heard a camera click at him.

"Sir, the pleasure is ours," said somebody who consisted chiefly of a mop of chestnut hair.

Mr. Fortune became confidential. "Would you mind? Do introduce me to the hostess?"

The small person made a curtsy in the grand style, a work of art made piquant by her shorts and her bare knees, and rising from it showed him beneath chestnut

hair a comical little face with no nose to speak of but large and dangerous eyes.

"So charming of you to give us the pleasure," she murmured in a conventional voice. "We were just going to tea." She put her hand in his arm and led him towards the tents.

Mr. Fortune's feet dragged. Mr. Fortune saw the shape of Miss Platt Robinson. Mr. Fortune gasped slightly. Not as once she sat majestic between Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc Miss Platt Robinson walked the island. That plump, important shape was clothed in a sweater and shorts. Mr. Fortune averted his eyes.

So did not she. Her prominent eyes swelled and glared from a red face. "Mr. Fortune!" she cried. "Positively outrageous!"

"Platty!" said the little creature on Mr. Fortune's arm. "Potatoes, Platty!" Two of the girls took Miss Platt Robinson and led her gently but firmly away.

Mr. Fortune was taken to the tents where two oil stoves were roaring beneath kettles and several deck-chairs stood.

"Won't you sit down?" said the little creature in her conventional voice. "Tea, children!"

"May I put on my shoes?" Reggie murmured.

"If you think you'll feel safer," she smiled.

He subsided on to the grass. He put on his shoes, he gazed at Miss Platt Robinson, who also sat on the ground but afar off with a pail between her legs, scraping a potato in a slow time—a tragic woman.

"She gave a lot of trouble!" the little creature smiled. "But I think she's beginning to grasp things."

"What things?" said Mr. Fortune anxiously.

"The great realities. If you don't work, you don't eat. Platty has to scrape the potatoes for dinner before she has her tea."

Mr. Fortune gazed at her in alarm. But a girl brought him a cup and buttered biscuits. He found himself the centre of a ring of curious and amused girls.

"Do you know all my young people?" said the little creature in her conventional voice. "Vi, Hoodlums, the

Wogger, Belinda"—she reeled off a string of names and nicknames, and laughed. "And you're Daniel in the lions' den, aren't you? What's your second name, Daniel?"

"I am called Fortune," said Reggie meekly.

"The Scotland Yard man?" she cried. "Oh, good work!"

"Yes. Yes, I am rather proud of it myself," Reggie murmured.

There were emotions among the sweaters. Someone pointed a finger at the slim, dark girl of the boat. "You've done it now, Vi. This is your fatal weakness for policemen."

"He's better here than spying on land," Vi smiled at him. "It's a long, long way to Tipperary, isn't it, Mr. Policeman?" She waved her hand to the surrounding sea.

"Yes, he's better here," the little person pronounced. "But how in the name of wonder did he get here? Prisoner, what brought you to the premises?"

"May I smoke?" Reggie smiled and lit a cigar. "Thanks. Well, the reasons were primarily geological."

"If there's any leg-pulling we'll do it, thank you."

"I wouldn't dream of it." Reggie swept a deprecating glance round the circle of Amazons. "It's unnecessary. The reasons were primarily geological; secondarily, gastronomic or culinary. Somebody sent a hermit crab to Miss Platt Robinson——"

"Oh, help! Platty didn't eat him, did she?" the little person gurgled.

"Is a hermit crab a crime, constable?" said Vi.

"The answer to both questions is in the negative," said Mr. Fortune gravely. "A hermit crab isn't even a clue. He might have come from anywhere round England. But his packing was very interesting; seaweed with some little lumps of sand caught in it, hard red lumps with lighter veins partly shell," he smiled at the small creature. "That gave me the hermit crab's address, you see, Miss—I'm sorry I didn't catch your name?"

"Couldn't you guess that from the seaweed?" said the little creature. "Bad luck! But you were quite clever, weren't you? What did you find in the sand?"

Mr. Fortune shook his head at her.

"No, not clever, only painstaking. All for your good. I found bits of *trophon contrarius.*"

"Is it catching?"

"No. It's a shellfish of the past. Of the pliocene, in fact, some time before you were born. It indicated that the sand was Red Crag. Red Crag only comes down to the sea between Felixstowe and Frinton. We come next to the gastronomic evidence provided by the tin. That tin had held pigeon pie. There were still fragments adhering. Well, one doesn't buy pigeon pie in tins for ordinary household purposes. So it emerged that somebody who was living in a boat or in camp on this bit of coast took a friendly interest in Miss Platt Robinson. I sent a man down to look for ladies living the simple life near Walton. He discovered your island. So when Miss Platt Robinson vanished I came to call." He smiled. "That's my half of the story. I should like to hear yours, Miss—— It really would be friendly to tell me your name."

The little person looked at him profoundly. She had greenish eyes flecked with brown. Curious eyes which laughed in their solemnity. She said nothing.

It was Vi who spoke with that pugnacious smile of hers. "Does your mother know you're out, Mr. Fortune?"

"You alarm me, madame!"

"That was the idea. You might be here a long time. Quite a long time. You might be peeling potatoes same as Platty. You might be helping her wash-up. Platty would like to have somebody else wash-up. Specially the bacon plates. We'd lend you some clothes, too. You'd look like a boy scout."

Mr. Fortune sighed. "You don't do me justice, you know. I am really kind at heart. I don't want you to get into serious trouble."

"I should worry!" Vi laughed. "Well, Snooky, what about him? He wants chastening."

"Don't be an owl," said the little person. "Mr. Fortune, you mean if we don't let you go off with Platty there'll be policemen coming to the island?"

"It is only too likely, Miss——"

"Well, what of it? You came here of your own choice. So did Platty. She stood there on the groyne looking like a pelican in the wilderness. Of course, we sent the boat across. When she was getting in she fell into the sea. So we lent her clothes while her own were drying. Then she wouldn't do her share of the washing-up. So Platty was made kitchen orderly. No work, no meals, for Platty. We're nice girls who rescue the perishin'. We're good girls who're findin' work for a forlorn female. Helpin' the unemployed. We're not afraid of your policemen, Mr. Fortune."

"You don't begin at the beginning, do you?" Reggie smiled. "What brought Miss Platt Robinson down to Walton Point, Lady Flora?"

"You pig!" the little person cried. "You knew me all the time!"

"You see, that's my job, to know all the time," Reggie said meekly. "But I don't. I don't know what Miss Platt Robinson will be up to when she gets back to land. There's threatening letters. There's assault. There's kidnapping."

"There isn't!" Lady Flora was shrill. "She came of her own silly, nasty mind."

"Oh, cut it out!" Vi said. "Let's maroon 'em together, Snooky!"

Lady Flora's green eyes gleamed gold. "That's a solution!"

"Not to-night," said Reggie, looking at the sea. The tide was far out. The island was surrounded by wide banks of muddy sand on which the boat lay high and dry. "Lot's of time to talk it over, Lady Flora. Do tell me how you brought her down here?"

Lady Flora considered him again.

She looked round at her cohort of girls. "Is he human? Who thinks he's human?"

A number of hands went up.

"Who thinks he's a pig?"

Vi voted for that with a frown.

"Mr. Fortune is human. Sir, listen to the story of our

young lives. In the War we were all good little girls making shells. Some fiend sent Platty down as a welfare-worker to our factory. Before we knew where we were, our superintendent was booted out and Platty had her job. That's Platty's little way. She's the World's Worst Wangler. And then she made us all happy. Platty's great on discipline. Platty's idea of discipline is makin' a girl do everything she don't want the way she hates to do it. She altered all our shifts. She upset all our days off. She turned down half the forewomen and put in a mob of her own. We used to call 'em Platty's Spy Corps. Oh, it was a merry old time. We should have had our own private revolution if the Germans hadn't started theirs first. The Armistice shut the factory down just in time to save Platty's neck. Well, we burnt Platty in effigy on Armistice night and resumed the life of peace. But we didn't forget her. And when we heard she'd wangled another big job, it was felt something had to be done about it. We remonstrated with her by hermit crabs, and so forth. But Platty went on her wicked way. We heard she was disciplining the poor girls in the Records Department same like she disciplined us. Then we took action. I called on Platty. She's always been a little afraid of me——"

"I don't wonder," Reggie murmured.

"Poor me!" said Lady Flora. "No, sir; it's the title that does it. Platty's a snob. Well, I called. I was friendly but patronizin'. I congratulated her on her appointment. I hoped—kind but cold—I hoped she'd make good. I understood the girls in the Records Department were a wild and wanton crowd. Platty said it was too true, but she was introducin' discipline. I hoped so, superior and incredulous. I had heard there was a party of them down here in camp shockin' the whole East Coast by their costume and conduct. Platty jumped at it. Where were they; who were they; what were they up to? So I gave her the address. And the next time I saw our Platty she was standin' there on the Point gogglin' at us. Wasn't she askin' for it, Mr. Fortune? We brought her over and we gave her discipline. If she isn't a brighter and a better

woman, it's not our fault. We've been quite firm with the Platter. She's had to do lots of things she didn't want the way she hates to do them. Look at her now."

Miss Platt Robinson stood glowering at a fire which smoked sullenly beneath a black cauldron.

"Platty's evening hate. She cannot make a fire burn. And if it won't burn, Platty has to wash-up in cold water. So good for Platty. The pains we take with her, Mr. Fortune!"

"Yes—yes," said Reggie dreamily. "Fellows who write plays tell me it's the last act that's the trouble. How's it going to end, Lady Flora? I don't see how it can end happily."

"Dear me, Mr. Fortune"—the little creature resumed her conventional voice—"I thought you had come here to clear it all up. That's what policemen are for, isn't it?"

"Policemen are human, you know. They feel for Miss Platt Robinson. She's a woman and a sister. And sisters can be very unpleasant sometimes. Haven't you noticed it?"

"You don't think she's grateful, Mr. Fortune?" said the little creature sadly.

"Speakin' from observation, I fear she isn't grateful. Speakin' from experience, I'm sure she has no sense of humour. And speakin' for myself, I'm frightened. What did you think of doing with her?"

"We thought a week's education would be enough," Mr. Fortune."

"You'll have police here before that. You'll be in a police-court for threatening letters, assault, and anything else Miss Platt Robinson's lawyers can think of."

"Then it would all come out!" the green eyes laughed. "How gorgeous! But she'd never risk it, Mr. Fortune. Think of Platty's prestige. Think of the girls in the Records Department chortling."

"She'd risk it all right," said Reggie sadly. "Aren't you a little hard on Miss Platt Robinson? You might give her a chance. You'll have to let her go soon. Why

not do it prettily? Let her go now if she'll kiss and be friends."

"Mr. Fortune, you're a wangler yourself!" the little creature cried.

"She shan't kiss me," someone said fervently. It seemed to be the general feeling.

"No doubt that can be arranged." Mr. Fortune smiled upon them.

"All right. It's got to end some time," Lady Flora said. "Shall he wangle?"

Hands went up.

"Shall he not wangle?"

Only the black-browed Vi opposed.

"Go and wangle, sir. First prize for courage—R. Fortune."

Miss Platt Robinson, surrounded by wood smoke, had a rather ghostly appearance.

"This is a distressin' situation, madame," said Reggie.

She struggled with passions. "What are you doing here?" she exploded.

"I'm trying to get you away. But your friends seem to be very determined young people."

"My friends!" Miss Platt Robinson gasped. "Don't you understand that this is an abominable outrage? Look at me!"

"I do—I do," said Reggie; and looked away. "Oh, Miss Platt Robinson, why did you come here?"

"I was kidnapped, sir."

"But you came alone. We found that out. All the way from London to Walton Point. And these damsels say you asked them to ferry you over."

"It's a conspiracy, Mr. Fortune," said Miss Platt Robinson vehemently. "These wretched girls wanted to get me in their power. That creature, Lady Flora, told me there was a party of my girls from the Records Department out here behaving scandalously. I considered it my duty to investigate. And look how they treated me!"

"Do you really want people to look at you?" Reggie said with emotion. "I mean to say, we can bring some

police over here and rescue you. But do you want policemen assistin' you in this—er—*négligé?*"

"It's perfectly disgraceful!" Miss Platt Robinson faltered.

"I'm only thinkin' of you," Reggie murmured. "You see, these young women say they didn't ask you to come, and they won't help you to go, and while you stay you'll have to work for your living."

"But that's outrageous!" Miss Platt Robinson whimpered.

"But the only answer is policemen—and you're in a sweater and shorts!"

"I don't know what they've done with my clothes. They've no right to keep my clothes. It's—why it's theft, at least. I can prosecute them all. Theft and kidnapping and conspiracy. Oh, they'll be sorry for this!"

"I shouldn't count on it!" Reggie shook his head. "Are you quite sure you want to prosecute, Miss Platt Robinson? If you take 'em into court they'll bring out the whole story. I'm only thinking of you. Do you want to be cross-examined about your camp life? Very sad reading for your girls in the Records Department. And, speakin' officially, I doubt if you'll get a conviction. They'll say you would come where you weren't wanted, and they fished you out of the sea and gave you dry clothes and——"

"But they won't let me go!" Miss Platt Robinson wailed. "Oh, Mr. Fortune, you must do something!"

"It is a distressing situation," Reggie agreed. "They're not fond of you, you know. They seem to think you haven't been nice to them. Why not try it? Bury the past. You want to get away. You don't want scandal. Well, kiss and be friends. Tell 'em if they put you ashore in your own clothes next tide you won't prosecute."

Miss Platt Robinson stared at him. "But I told them that yesterday!" she cried. "They only laughed at me!"

"Is it possible they didn't trust you?" Reggie sighed. "This is very painful. I wonder if they'll trust me?"

"Do try, Mr. Fortune!"

"Freedom and your own skirt, and no prosecution?" Reggie held out his hand. "Promise?"

"Of course!" Miss Platt Robinson took his hand gingerly.

Reggie strolled back to the circle of girls by the tents. "Peace with honour. You put her ashore in the morning clothed and in her right mind. She don't prosecute."

"Good for Platty!" said Lady Flora. "No more washing-up for Platty! Reveal Platty's clothes, Vi. She'll want to dress for dinner."

She did, but she was not sociable. Except towards the lemon cheese-cakes, her manner was restrained. She retired early, desiring to be put ashore as soon as possible in the morning. The flap of a tent fell behind her.

"Well done, Platty!" said Lady Flora. "Didn't she behave prettily? Not one rude word! Quite a reformed character. I thought we could educate her. Those women in her department won't know their Platty." She sighed. "What have I done for thee, England, my England?" The last of the sunset lingered rosy, the moon was rising out of a gleam of silver on the sea, and from the mainland came faintly the bleating of sheep. "All is peace and I feel so good. It's quite disconcertin', Mr. Fortune."

"Yes. I shouldn't let that worry you," said Reggie.

Between a ground-sheet and a rug he dozed uneasily through that night. Stiff, crumpled, and unshorn in a blaze of morning sunshine, he was landed beside Miss Platt Robinson on Walton Point. She was primly neat. He had never disliked her so much. From the island came three joyful cheers.

"Really!" Miss Platt Robinson muttered, and set her lips.

"I quite agree with you," said Reggie heartily.

But she had no more to say, and she strode out at a round pace. When they came to the town: "I was thinking of a bath and some breakfast," he ventured.

"I am taking the first train to London," said she.

Reggie sighed relief and turned into a barber's.

The next morning, among his letters, he found one from Lady Flora.

"Dear Mr. Fortune,—Perhaps it would be good for you to have these. With our love." These were photographs, chiefly of Miss Platt Robinson. Miss Platt Robinson was shown in sweater and shorts blowing the fire, scraping the potatoes, washing the dishes. But what Mr. Fortune stared at was the postscript, for Lady Flora had written: "Wouldn't they look nice in the picture papers?"

Mrs. Fortune was allured by his expression. "Reggie, have you told me all?" said she tragically, and she came to look. "Oh, bless her! My dear, they ought to have taken her for the movies!"

"I shouldn't wonder if they did," said Reggie morosely.

"But what is this? She found a photograph of Reggie walking barefoot, with his shoes in his hand, and bowing. "Oh, you precious! I want this enlarged!"

"You have no heart, Joan!" Reggie complained. "No woman has any heart!"

Mrs. Fortune gurgled. She had found another photograph of him putting on his shoes, while a circle of girls admired him. "But it's a Mormon," said she. "A nice, shy Mormon!"

At this point a maid came in to say that Mr. Lomas had rung up to ask Mr. Fortune to go to Scotland Yard at once.

Lomas received him severely. "You wired me that the Platt Robinson was returning safe and in good condition."

"Oh my aunt!" Reggie gasped. "Didn't she?"

"I don't know whether you're mad or she is. As far as I can make out you've been compounding felony and committing high treason and being no gentleman. Look at that."

It was a letter of many sheets, a formal complaint from Miss Platt Robinson to the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department that she had been kidnapped and kept in captivity by a party of women acting in collusion with one of his officials, Mr. Reginald Fortune. She proposed to call on Mr. Lomas and lay the facts be-

fore him. She expected him to take drastic action on her behalf.

"She's not a nice woman, Lomas," said Reggie sadly, "not really a nice woman."

"Good Gad, don't be futile. The woman's capable of dragging the department into a big scandal. What are the facts?"

So Reggie told him. Reggie showed him the photographs.

He was profoundly moved. "Poor wretch, I don't wonder she's peevish."

"No. I thought she was peevish. Do you wonder I told her to hush it up?"

"It's the only thing to do, of course. She'd ruin her position if she drags all this out. Good Gad! Think of these snapshots in the picture papers."

"I do," said Reggie. "I'm in one or two. Lady Flora's very resourceful."

"Oh, the Platt Robinson must let it drop. I'll manage her."

"I wonder," Reggie sighed.

"I can frighten her," said Lomas.

And Miss Platt Robinson came. Lomas put up his eyeglass, Lomas glared at her, Lomas rang for a shorthand writer. "Sit down, madame. You have made a grave charge against a trusted adviser of mine. Mr. Fortune will be present at this interview. I am having a note taken of all that you say. Let me warn you that I am acquainted with all the facts and approve of Mr. Fortune's action throughout. It is entirely owing to his skill and resource that you have been saved from a distressing situation to which you had come by your own folly. You are now breaking a promise which you made in your own interests. You are bringing a false charge against him. I warn you that anything you say without foundation will involve you in very serious consequences."

Miss Platt Robinson flinched. She did not expect to be treated like this. She had been outrageously treated. She wanted those women punished.

"You undertook not to prosecute them in order to prevent the practical joke which they had played on you being made public. Mr. Fortune gave you good advice. You want to break that undertaking. Do you want to see these photographs in the picture papers?" He handed them across the table.

"Oh! Abominable!" Miss Platt Robinson cried, and crushed them into a ball.

"They have the negatives, you know. Do you want to make it public you roused such ill-feeling in the department you last controlled that the women determined to punish you like this?"

"What am I to do? Is nothing to be done for me?"

"We have done a great deal for you. We have extricated you from a most unpleasant situation without scandal. It is more than your conduct gave you a right to expect. I have done with the case."

"No one is to be punished?" Miss Platt Robinson gasped. "What about all those threatening letters I had?"

"Threats? I have read no threats."

"Insulting!"

"Have you any proof who wrote them? We have none."

"You don't want proof!" Miss Platt Robinson cried.

"Good morning, madame," said Lomas: and when she had gone he smiled on Reggie.

"I wonder," Reggie murmured. "You know, I should put a man to watch her, Lomas. I don't think she's safe."

"Good Gad!" Lomas dropped his eyeglass and his smile. "What can she do? Assassinate Lady Flora? Or do you think Lady Flora's rascals will be after her again?"

"Some nice quiet man," Reggie murmured. "She's not safe alone."

It was a month afterwards that Mr. Fortune, visiting Lomas on the matter of the infested marmoset (a crime, you remember, of passion), was shown the report of the detectives who had been observing Miss Platt Robinson. No one had attempted to interfere with the lady. She had gone nowhere except to a few public meetings, and several

times on a jaunt by 'bus in the evening from her suburb to Finsbury Park.

"Not worth while keeping the men on the job, is it?" Lomas shrugged. "Evidently Lady Flora's finished with her, and she's not meddling with Lady Flora."

"But why Finsbury Park?" said Reggie. "Lot's of nice places nearer home. What does she do at Finsbury Park? I could bear to know that, Lomas."

"My dear fellow, lots of simple people like a 'bus ride on a summer evening."

"She's not simple," Reggie protested. "Not at all a nice woman, Lomas. Tell your fellows to find out what she does at Finsbury Park."

"Oh, very well," Lomas shrugged. "You've got Miss Platt Robinson on your nerves, Reginald."

"I have, I have."

Two weeks later there came to Lomas a letter from the Minister of Social Welfare. Mr. Weeley regretted to find that the Criminal Investigation Department had failed to discover the author of the threatening letters received by Miss Platt Robinson. Emboldened, he was compelled to assume, by this strange inertia of the police, this person had now sent letters of a more scandalous character. Very fortunately, however, impunity had made the author rash. If Mr. Lomas would kindly call upon him, he would be able to point out evidence which must lead to drastic action.

"Yes. I shouldn't wonder if he's right," Mr. Fortune smiled.

"You know this woman's a public nuisance," Lomas groaned. "Who's after her now?"

"Have you got that letter we found in her blotting-book?"

"Of course I have. All the Platt Robinson communications—except the hermit crab. You had that."

"He wouldn't keep. But the letter will."

"We never found out how it came to her, you know. It wasn't posted."

"No. It wasn't posted," Reggie smiled. "That's what's

interesting. Lomas, my dear old thing, what about Finsbury Park? What did Miss Platt Robinson do at Finsbury Park?"

Lomas rang for the reports. They testified that on three nights during the past fortnight Miss Platt Robinson had posted a letter, once certainly a blue letter, in a certain pillar-box at Finsbury Park. "Very sound man, that man," Reggie murmured, and turned the pages of the London Directory. "Pillar-box at the corner of Curtis Road and Garden Road. Garden Road . . . yes. Lomas, dear, ring up Mr. Weeley and tell him we'll come round to him now if he'll have Miss Platt Robinson and her letters ready for us."

"I don't see my way," Lomas protested.

"My dear fellow! Oh, my dear fellow!" Reggie chuckled. "Then leave it to me."

They found Mr. Weeley frowning majestically, guarded by a cynical secretary who did not conceal his disgust for the whole affair. Over against him Miss Platt Robinson swelled and preened herself. Mr. Weeley spoke. He had to complain of the manner in which the Criminal Investigation Department had handled this serious case. He was bound to say—he desired to point out—he must add—and he had only to remark in conclusion. It was deplorable that inertia—he did not wish to use the word incompetence—should expose a valued public servant to such persecution.

"Yes. It will save time if we come to the facts, sir," Reggie said. "I understand Miss Platt Robinson has received some fresh letters! Where are they?"

Mr. Weeley again delivered an oration. The secretary handed Reggie six letters. They were on pale blue rough paper. They were in a bold hand. Their tone was alike. The last said: "Do not imagine you will be allowed to stay here. We shall get you out somehow. No outsiders here. The Civil Service does not want them. I have had more than enough of your meddling. I have friends and influence behind me. You will not be superintendent long."

Reggie read it aloud. "Very painful. The work of a spite-

ful and cunning mind," he said gravely. "And Miss Platt Robinson has evidence who was the writer."

"Look at the postmark, please." Miss Platt Robinson smiled.

"Posted—last Friday—N.4. The others the same."

"N.4 is Finsbury Park," said Miss Platt Robinson. "Perhaps Mr. Fortune will compare the writing with this." She handed him an official document signed E. Thornton.

"Surely I have seen this writing before?" Reggie frowned.

"Do you know her?" Miss Platt Robinson cried.

"I have only met her in your room, madame. When we were investigating the earlier letters you gave me a document written by your assistant-superintendent. You suspected her then."

"I have always suspected her," Miss Platt Robinson cried. "Don't you see the likeness?"

"It leaps to the eye," said Mr. Weeley. "Yes, positively I am compelled to say. It leaps to the eye."

"And Miss Thornton lives at Finsbury Park," Miss Platt Robinson cried in triumph. "23 Garden Road, Finsbury Park. That is the paper she uses. Look, here is a note of hers. She writes with a J nib."

"You've prepared the evidence very carefully, madame." Reggie said.

"The writing is surely conclusive," Mr. Weeley pronounced.

"Yes. The writing is like Miss Thornton's writing," Reggie said. "But it's even more like this." He produced the letter found in Miss Platt Robinson's blotting book and read it out: " 'You will not be superintendent long.' Just compare that, sir."

Miss Platt Robinson became red. "Where did you get that?" she gasped.

"You see the resemblance, Mr. Weeley. Six weeks ago, when Miss Platt Robinson's sudden absence from London alarmed some of her friends, they called us in. Lomas and I went to her house to make inquiries. We found this letter on her writing table. We found some of this blue

paper. We found one of her pens fitted with a J nib. The letter has not been posted, you see. It is obvious that it was an experiment in imitating Miss Thornton's writing. The first of the series. The others were posted by Miss Platt Robinson herself. In the last few weeks she has often been to Finsbury Park of nights. Fortunately she was attended by a detective. He has seen her post four letters in the pillar-box near Miss Thornton's house at the corner of Garden Road. Last Friday he saw that the letter was blue. Miss Platt Robinson has been writing herself these letters in order to bring a false charge against her assistant-superintendent. I don't know whether you wish the case to go to the Public Prosecutor or whether you will deal with it yourself."

"Obviously a case for the Public Prosecutor," said Lomas.

"Good heavens, woman, what have you done?" Mr. Weeley cried.

"It's a conspiracy, Mr. Weeley," Miss Platt Robinson wailed. "They've been working against me all through. They had no business in my house! Setting detectives to watch me. Outrageous!"

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Weeley. "Outrageous, indeed. Is that all you have to say? Don't you see what you've done? You've involved the office in a scandal, a gross scandal, madame. It's intolerable. A most painful thing. You've betrayed my confidence in you in the most deplorable way. Really—oh, you must go."

"Not back to the department, Miss Platt Robinson," said the secretary.

"Not——? Oh, Mr. Weeley, you don't mean that?"

"Great heavens, woman, you don't think you can retain your position after this?"

Miss Platt Robinson's eyes swelled at him. The words which came to Miss Platt Robinson were: "Outrageous! Really outrageous!" She rose. She made strange noises. "It's a conspiracy against me," she announced. "You've all agreed to trump this up. I won't bear it. I'd rather resign." The door slammed behind her.

"Not really a nice woman," Reggie murmured.

"Yes, yes—I mean no, of course," Mr. Weeley bleated. "A most painful affair. At the same time I am bound to point out, Lomas—I do hope you agree with me—no reason why it should go any further."

"Now she's gone I dare say Miss Thornton won't want to prosecute her," Lomas shrugged.

"Mis Thornton's a very good official," said the secretary.

"Yes, quite so, quite so. It is a mistaken policy to appoint these outsiders. I always thought so," said Mr. Weeley.

Outside in the corridor: "But I wish we could have sacked him too," said Reggie sadly.

"You never will," Lomas sighed. "Not while England's England. Even you have your limitations, Reginald. That comforts me. For I find you rather diabolical."

"No. No. Only careful," said Mr. Fortune.

# RICHARD CONNELL

## THE STING OF THE WASP

THAT night Matthew Kelton was working over a new puzzle, a cryptogram—a most difficult one. He had given himself till five in the morning to solve it. Then he would brew himself a cup of tea and go to bed. There was a smile on his face, which was rather like a ripe crabapple. He was getting the key to the cipher. But then, he usually did.

Matthew Kelton had one passion—puzzles. Having had the forethought to make a neat fortune for himself by inventing some new chemicals, he was able, in middle age, to retire and devote his life to his favorite pastime. Any sort of riddle held a fascination for him; but what interested him most was the deepest, strangest riddle of all—the riddle of human behavior.

The clock in the corner of his prim old-fashioned study struck midnight. He bent his white head over the maze of symbols and hieroglyphics which made up the cryptogram. Then his telephone rang. With a certain mild impatience he went to answer it.

"This is Evan Turner," said the voice at the other end of the wire.

"Hello, Evan. Something wrong? Your voice is tense."

"Can you come to the house of Guy Oakley—that big, ugly place on Dark River Road—at once?"

"I'm rather busy. What for?"

"Because," said Turner, "they've just found the body of Lewis Cope there—and he's been murdered—shot."

"Any idea who did it?"

The man at the other end of the wire hesitated. Before

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Turner could answer, Matthew Kelton said, "They're accusing Guy Oakley. Isn't that the situation?"

"Yes."

"Does he admit it?"

"No."

"Has he an alibi?"

Again Turner hesitated. "No. Not a conclusive one, anyhow."

"Doesn't sound like Oakley," said Matthew Kelton. "Still, you never can tell. Repressed men explode sometimes. Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Drive over here immediately."

"But why, Evan? I'm deep in a real puzzle. I see no puzzle in the killing of Cope. The bitter hate of Oakley for Cope, and Cope for Oakley, has become a classic, like the friendship of Damon and Pythias. When two strong men hate like that, something is bound to happen. Apparently, now it has."

"My duty is to do everything I possibly can to save Guy Oakley," said Turner. "That's why I'm turning to you. You might see something the police would miss. You'd be doing me a great favor, Matthew, to come over."

"Simple, vulgar murder fails to interest me much. It's worse than stupid—it's in bad taste," said Matthew Kelton. He thought a moment. "You say that Guy Oakley has no real alibi?"

"I'll be frank with you, Matthew. He hasn't. A jury would laugh at his story, and hang him without leaving the box."

"H-mm. Now *that* is interesting. In fact, I scent the elements of a puzzle. I'll be right over!"

The residence of Guy Oakley, the banker, was a vast and gloomy mid-Victorian house, on the edge of an extensive pine wood.

Matthew Kelton was shown into a large somber drawing-room, full of black walnut furniture. A group of men had gathered there—Oakley, Evan Turner, Police Captain Lamotte, Doctor Ussher. They bowed toward Matthew Kelton as he came in.

"Evening, Mr. Kelton," the police captain said. "A bad business, I'm afraid."

"Crime always is, Captain. Well?"

"Come into the library with me, Matthew. I'll give you the facts," Evan Turner said.

Matthew Kelton followed the lawyer into an austere, book-lined room.

"Oakley is my client," said the lawyer. "I don't dodge the fact that the evidence is dead against him. He hated Cope, and Cope hated him. It's an old story, and not a pretty one."

"A woman?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Cope?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"They were sworn enemies. Their hatred was almost a religion with them. I'm not going to keep any important fact from you, Matthew."

"Quite right."

"Only a week ago I had dinner with Guy Oakley in this very house. I've been his attorney for years, but I've never been a close friend. I doubt if he has any."

"Strong, silent men are apt not to."

"Well, the cocktails warmed up Oakley, made him communicative—for him. We were talking along about nothing in particular, when suddenly he burst out, 'That cur, Cope! I saw him to-day, looking at me with those evil green eyes of his. I'll never be happy—or safe—while he's in the world. I'd kill him like a rat if I thought I could get away with it!'

"I told Oakley he was a fool to talk like that—to me, or anybody. He calmed down, and said he didn't mean it. But he did, Matthew."

"No doubt. Well, what then?"

"Here is what happened to-night: Oakley had dinner alone. He drank too much—four stiff cocktails, a half-bottle of sauterne, and a high-ball. So Reeves, his butler, testified. Liquor, as I know, always made him sullen, even

savage. He was in a decidedly bad humor. Reeves says, when he went into his library immediately after dinner.

"At half past nine, Lewis Cope came to the house. He was in dinner clothes, and he seemed to be in a high state of excitement, Reeves, who let him in, says. He pushed past Reeves, and went into the library. Reeves heard the sound of angry voices, as if Oakley and Cope were having a violent row. Reeves went down in the cellar to look at the furnace fire, and was there possibly eight or nine minutes.

"When he came up-stairs, no sounds could be heard in the library. Somewhat alarmed, Reeves tapped at the door and, getting no answer, went in. Oakley was sprawling in a chair, apparently in a drunken stupor, for there was a half-bottle of rye and a glass on the table. Cope had gone. Reeves helped Oakley up-stairs, and put him to bed. It seems that Reeves was rather used to that sort of thing."

"Solitary drinker, eh?"

"Yes."

"Bad," said Matthew Kelton. "Bad."

"At twenty minutes past eleven," continued Turner, "Oakley's chauffeur and his wife, and the gardener and *his* wife returned from town in the station wagon. They'd been in to see a movie. As they came up the main drive the car's head-lights picked up something white, lying by the roadside on the lawn, about twenty-five yards from the house. It was Cope's shirt front. He had been shot through the heart. Slight powder marks were on the shirt, as if he had been shot from a distance of two or three feet.

"Without stopping to make any sort of examination, the chauffeur and the others drove down Dark River Road about a quarter of a mile, to where a state trooper is stationed, regulating traffic. Sergeant Lester, a keen young officer, came back with them, and with his flashlight made a thorough examination of the body and the ground around it. He found no weapon. He 'phoned for Captain Lamotte, who arrived shortly with Police Surgeon Ussher.

Doctor Ussher said Cope had been dead about an hour. They went into the house, and woke up Oakley. He appeared to be groggy from the drink, but the shock of seeing Cope's body sobered him completely. He kept a tight grip on himself, however. Said nothing. Merely stared at Cope.

"Captain Lamotte, who was watching him closely, says that he read in Oakley's face a fierce hate for Cope, even in death. Captain Lamotte is a man of action. He said to Oakley, 'Did you do this?' . . . 'I didn't,' said Oakley. 'I wish I had!'

"I arrived just then and shut up Oakley. Also, I persuaded Captain Lamotte not to arrest him formally until you had a chance to look things over. Bankers can't afford to be arrested, even if they are entirely innocent."

"And it's even worse if they're guilty, I suppose," said Matthew Kelton. "Evan, I don't see much hope for Oakley. I dare say Lewis Cope was no ornament to society—a vicious, ill-matured fellow, I've always heard. Even so, it was mad of Oakley to kill him, especially like this."

"Drink-crazed," muttered Turner, more to himself than to Matthew Kelton.

"Beginning to work out your line of defense, eh?"

"Looks as if I'll need to."

"What about self-defense?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"Not much chance. There was no sign of a struggle, as Sergeant Lester will testify. Oakley denies emphatically that he had any sort of physical fight with Cope."

"Suppose you ask Mr. Oakley to step in here a moment. I'm not the sort of man who can tell a guilty person from an innocent one by feeling his pulse, but I'd like to ask a few questions."

The lawyer went into the other room and returned with Guy Oakley. The banker was a big man, fifty, perhaps, with the lined and seamed face of a man who has known much worry and sorrow in his life.

"Have a cigar, Mr. Oakley," Matthew Kelton greeted him. "I have these made in Havana." He offered Oakley

his case. The banker took a long cigar, lit it. His fingers, Kelton noted, were steady.

"Now, Mr. Oakley, please tell me, briefly, what happened to-night," Matthew Kelton said, as casually as if he were asking for a description of a card game.

"I didn't kill Cope," said Oakley. He sank into a chair, as if he were very tired.

"That's what Turner and I will have to prove," said Matthew Kelton. "Help us by telling us exactly what occurred."

"I've been on the ragged edge, lately," the banker said. "Nerves all jangled. Business worries—and Cope. I think he hated me on sight. I know I took a strong dislike to him when I first met him, some seven years ago. That happens sometimes, you know.

"Then—four years ago—we got into that mess. We both behaved pretty badly, I guess. It was a nasty snarl of treachery, deceit, lies all 'round. It's all over now. She—she's dead. But our hate lived. Cope I knew to be vindictive—and subtle. I've seen him watching me with the eyes of a snake, waiting to strike. I waited. It was harrowing."

"Naturally," said Matthew Kelton. "Then?"

"To-night I drank too much at dinner. I've been doing that lately. An escape, you see. Afterward, I went into my library, with a bottle of rye. Frankly, my idea was to drink myself unconscious. I was well on the way when suddenly Cope came into the room. I thought at first it was some ghastly vision my disordered senses had conjured up.

"Then Cope began to talk. 'You're afraid of me, Oakley,' he said. 'You have reason to be.' I thought he had come to kill me."

"Were you armed?" Matthew Kelton asked.

"No."

"You own a gun, though. Where was it?"

"I have several. Two. One was in a drawer in the dresser of my bedroom." The banker hesitated.

"And the other?"

"In the pocket of the suit I took off when I dressed for dinner."

"I see. Go on."

"Cope stood there looking at me. His face was the face of a crazy man. He smiled, a terrible smile. Then, very quietly he said, 'I've good news for you, Oakley. A doctor examined me to-day. You'll be delighted to know that my lungs are bad. I'll be lucky to live out the year. I hope we'll meet in torment.'

"He stood there looking at me with his green eyes. I burst out, 'Get out of here!' He dropped his quiet manner. 'Why don't you kill me!' he shouted. 'I will,' I said, and started to struggle to my feet. Because of the drink my body was not under good control. To my astonishment he did not attack me. Instead he backed away, smiling that terrible smile.

" 'Not to-night,' he said, and laughed. I'll hear that laugh in my dreams. 'No,' he said, like a man talking to himself, 'I'll not kill you to-night. And you can't kill me, Oakley, because I've been dead for years.

" 'But some day I will kill you, Oakley. You can look forward to that. Yours will not be a pleasant death. Good night!'

"He turned and went quickly out of the room. I stood there a moment or so, dazed. Then I downed a whole glass of rye, and sank down on a chair, pretty thoroughly knocked out. The next thing I knew Reeves was putting me to bed. That is the absolute truth!"

"You heard no shot?"

"No."

"You did not follow Cope out of the house?"

"No."

"Mr. Oakley," said Matthew Kelton, unexpectedly, "why do you wear only one stud in your evening shirt?"

The banker glanced down at his shirt front. It had two buttonholes. The top one held a black pearl stud, set in platinum. The bottom hole was empty.

"Couldn't find the other one," the banker said. "Maybe the burglars took it."

"What burglars?"

"My house was burglarized a couple of months ago, while I was away. They made off with some plate and jewelry. Nothing very valuable."

"That's all for the present, Mr. Oakley," said Matthew Kelton. The banker joined the others in the drawing-room.

Matthew Kelton gravely puffed at his cigar.

"I don't envy you your job, Evan," he said. "I've seldom listened to a clumsier and less plausible story."

"It might be true."

"That's what you'll have to convince a hard-headed jury. But, Evan, bear this in mind: there are times when nothing is more unbelievable than the truth. I'd like to see Cope's body."

Matthew Kelton, together with Turner, Captain Lamotte, Doctor Ussher and Oakley, went out to the spot where Cope's body, covered with a blanket, lay, awaiting the arrival of the coroner. Sergeant Lester was on guard.

With a powerful electric torch, Matthew Kelton made a brief examination of the body.

"Found anything new, Sergeant?" he asked.

"I've got the bullet, Mr. Kelton. Dug it out of the ground. It went clean through him."

"Let me see it, please."

The sergeant dropped a small lead pellet into Matthew Kelton's palm. Kelton examined it closely.

"What do you make of it, Captain?"

"I know a bit about guns. Hobby of mine," the police captain said. "But this bullet is something unusual. Steel nose. Very long. Like a small nail, almost. Two big for a .22 caliber. Too small for a .32. I can't tell what sort of gun fired it. I'd say, though, that it was fired at close range and by a steady hand."

"Obviously," said Matthew Kelton, studying the bullet. "Guns are a hobby of mine too, Captain. Now, it's my opinion—an opinion merely, you understand—that this bullet was fired from a Skomak pistol."

"Never heard of one," said the police captain.

"Not many people in America have," said Matthew Kelton, looking, not at the captain, but at Guy Oakley. "And that's fortunate too. I doubt if there are a dozen weapons of this particular sort in the entire country. They are the invention of a German and are, or rather were, made in Czechoslovakia. The police prohibited their manufacture after about a hundred had been placed on the market. They are tiny, single-shot pistols of .25 caliber, so small they can easily be carried in a vest pocket.

"The inventor, who had a macabre sense of humor, called his pistol 'the murderess,' because it was so convenient for homicidally inclined ladies to carry in a hand bag. It looks like a toy—but it was with such a toy that poor Cope was killed."

Abruptly Matthew Kelton said to Oakley. "Do you own a Skomak pistol?"

The banker's jaw tightened. "I do."

"Where is it?"

"In the top drawer of my dresser."

"Loaded?"

"Yes; I keep it loaded."

"Did you have it to-night?"

"I did not."

"When did you last see it?"

"I don't remember—exactly. I got it from a New York importing firm several months ago. I practiced target shooting with it on several occasions. It was rather inaccurate at more than about twenty feet. I loaded it, and put it in a small drawer of my dresser, and have had no occasion to take it out since then."

"Then it should be there now."

"Yes."

"Loaded?"

"I'm certain of that."

"What about your other pistol?"

"That is an ordinary, five-shot automatic of a well-know American make. It is in the hip pocket of the gray suit hanging in my closet."

"Sergeant Lester," said Matthew Kelton, "will you

please go up to Mr. Oakley's room and bring back both guns?"

"Yes, Mr. Kelton."

"Let's see, now," said Matthew Kelton, "was Cope armed?"

"No," said Police Captain Lamotte. "Here is a list of the contents of his pockets: A gold watch and chain to one end of which is attached a cigarette lighter. A leather wallet containing nothing but some visiting cards, and forty-two dollars in bills. A white silk handkerchief, with his initials, L. C., on it. A flat pigskin cigarette case, containing four cigarettes. A small paper bag, containing what appears to be raw beefsteak cut into cubes about the size of lumps of sugar—"

"Well, I'm dashed!" exclaimed Matthew Kelton, his eyes brightening. "There's some puzzle here. Let me look at this odd exhibit."

He peered into the paper bag.

"Now, why," he said, "should a well-to-do gentleman like Cope carry a bag of bits of meat in the pocket of his dinner coat?"

"You've got me there," said the police captain.

"Anything else in his pockets?"

"No. Wait a bit. Sergeant Lester did pick up something that must have fallen from Cope's pocket. Here it is."

He handed a small object to Matthew Kelton. It was a black pearl stud, set in platinum.

Quickly Kelton bent over and stared at the body.

"It's not Cope's," he announced. "His studs are plain gold, and they are all in place." He wheeled 'round to Guy Oakley, and thrust the black pearl stud under his eyes.

"Is this yours?" Kelton shot at him.

The banker looked at it with wide eyes. "Yes. That's mine."

"How do you explain its presence here?"

"I can't."

Sergeant Lester came hurrying up.

"Here are the two pistols, Mr. Kelton," he said.

Swiftly Matthew Kelton snapped the safety catch off the automatic, and looked into the magazine. It was full. Then he took the small Skomak pistol, opened it, examined the chamber. The brass butt of a cartridge could be seen. He shook the cartridge out into his hand, and whistled. It had been fired.

Guy Oakley cried wildly, "I tell you it was loaded when last I saw it!"

"It isn't loaded now," said Matthew Kelton grimly. . . . "Great Scott, what is that?"

From the woods came a cry—a long-drawn, moaning, eerie sound. They all started.

Then Evan Turner laughed.

"It's an owl—one of those big horned fellows. The woods around here are full of them this time of year. What a racket he is kicking up! Some night animal, perhaps a lynx, has got hold of him, I suppose."

The owl uttered a series of agonized cries. They stopped, abruptly.

"Another tragedy," muttered Turner.

Matthew Kelton said nothing. He was standing, silent, and his face wore a look of the utmost concentration.

"Imagination," he said.

"What?"

"Nothing. Sergeant Lester?"

"Yes, sir?"

"You made a careful examination of the ground around Cope's body?"

"Every inch of it, within a radius of ten yards or more," the sergeant answered.

"And found nothing?"

"Only that stud."

"How tall, Doctor Ussher, do you think Cope is?"

"Well over six feet."

Matthew Kelton called Police Captain Lamotte to one side.

"Captain," he said, "as a favor to me, I'm going to ask you not to place Mr. Oakley under arrest until to-morrow.

Keep him confined to his house, and watch the house. But don't arrest him."

"You don't mean he isn't guilty?" demanded the policeman. "Why, there's enough evidence against him to swing a couple of men!"

"Granted. If he is guilty, he'll be just as guilty to-morrow as he is to-night. If you don't hear from me by five to-morrow afternoon, arrest him."

"It's taking a chance," the police captain said.

"I'll answer for him," said Matthew Kelton.

"Well," said Captain Lamotte, "you've helped me out a lot of times, and you've never let me down yet. I'll do what you want. But—look here—you've got some theory. What is it?"

Matthew Kelton smiled. "I wouldn't call it a theory," he said. "It's a flight of fancy, a wild, wild speculation. If I told you, you'd think I'd been hitting the hop pipe. Wait till to-morrow!"

He turned to the others.

"I'm going home now," Matthew Kelton said, "and finish my cryptogram. It's a corker."

"Can you hold out any hope?" asked Evan Turner.

"Only a shadow, Evan, I'm afraid. Come to my house to-morrow morning at ten. You'll find me out in my apiary, thinking. The presence of bees always helps me think. Good night."

Evan Turner found Matthew Kelton in the apiary in the garden of his house next morning, sitting on a stool, watching the bees.

"Morning, Evans," said Kelton. "Bees are most interesting people. Spiders, too. I find them a great help in some of my problems. Sometimes, when I have a problem in human conduct, I reduce it to terms of bees or spiders. In the insect world you'll often find the little fellows acting very much as their larger relations, men, act.

"Take certain lady spiders, for example. Invariably, they eat their husbands. The poor husbands appear to know what fate is in store for them if they go a-courting;

but love conquers all, and the gallant little Romeo goes to his rendezvous, and presently serves as a breakfast for his Juliet.

"I watched such a performance last spring, and it suggested a line, by following which, I was able to clear up the bizarre case of Mrs. Marlton and her three poisoned husbands. Now the irrational, but rather human conduct of a certain species of wasp—"

"Matthew," interrupted Evan Turner, nervously, "it's after ten. Let's discuss the ways of wasps some other time. Oakley's life is at stake."

"As I was saying," went on Matthew Kelton calmly, "the conduct of a wasp I witnessed just before you arrived gave me a hint which may be the means of saving Oakley from the gallows."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not going to tell you, Evan," answered Matthew Kelton, with a smile, "I'm going to try to show you. There's a very strong chance I'm entirely wrong. I have gone about the matter in a quite illogical way. I have started with a fantastic theory. Now I must look for hard, concrete facts to back it up. I think I'll take my friend the wasp along with me, for good luck."

Matthew Kelton picked up a specimen card to which was pinned a large wasp. He put it in his pocket.

"Let's be on our way, Evan," he said.

"Where?"

"To Lewis Cope's house."

"What for?"

"Facts," said Matthew Kelton. "We need them."

"Cope lived in a small house on the edge of Briarly Forest," Evan Turner said. "For the last three or four years he was a recluse; practically, a hermit."

"Solitude," observed Matthew Kelton, as they started away in his car, "is dangerous for men with brooding minds."

He said nothing more until they found the house of Lewis Cope, a plain stone box of a place at the end of a lane. Not near any other human habitation.

"Hardly a cheerful place," said Kelton, getting out of his car.

"What do you expect to find here, Matthew?" questioned Evan Turner.

"I'd not be astonished and, indeed, I'd be rather pleased," answered Matthew Kelton, "if I were to find a mouse trap."

The house was deserted. The front door was locked, but the lock soon succumbed to Matthew Kelton's skeleton key, and the two men entered.

The house was simply furnished, and for a man Cope had been a fairly neat housekeeper.

"Let's see what he read," said Kelton, glancing about the living-room. "A man is what he reads, you know."

He shook his head as he looked at the small bookcase. Lewis Cope's library consisted of an old set of the works of Poe, and a fairly new encyclopedia of ornithology in four volumes.

"Queer combination," said Matthew Kelton. "Significant, too. It's a bad sign, Evan, when a man lives all alone, and hasn't a large library."

He wandered out toward the kitchen. A faint, squeaking sound was heard, coming from a small pantry. Matthew Kelton smiled. He pushed open the door, and pointed. There in a corner was a large, old-fashioned mouse trap, of the wire maze type, and it held three live and frightened prisoners. Matthew Kelton set them free and they scampered away.

"So far, so good," he remarked. "Now, for a hasty look at the woodshed, and we're finished here."

He stopped in the kitchen long enough to rummage about in an odds-and-ends drawer. He pounced on something there, took it out, put it in his pocket. The mystified Turner saw that it was nothing more exciting than a small ball of light but strong twine.

Lewis Cope had devoted some of his solitude to sawing wood. It was arranged in neat piles in the shed.

"Nothing here," said Turner.

"No?"

"I don't see a thing but some wood, an ax, a saw, a chopping block, a few rakes and hoes, and an old parrot cage."

Matthew Kelton, humming to himself, was gazing at the cage.

"What do you make of it?" he asked the lawyer.

"I deduce," said Turner, with mock seriousness, "that at one time Cope, in common with many other people who live alone, kept a pet parrot. I further deduce that at some time the bird died or escaped, so he put the cage out here."

"Anything else?"

"I am unable, with the data at hand, to determine the age, sex, or name of the parrot," said Turner.

"Look at the condition of the cage," said Matthew Kelton. "Look at those small red stains. Go on, deduce some more."

Evan Turner surveyed the cage more closely.

"Offhand," he said, "I'd say that Polly met a violent death, and within the past two days. Possibly she said something Cope didn't like, and in a fit of temper he wrung her neck."

All Matthew Kelton said was: "The face of a man, even in death, tells you things about him. Now, I didn't think Cope looked like a man given to uncontrolled outbursts of emotion. He seemed to me to be of the type which has strong, hot passions, but a cold brain which guides them. Come, we must be going."

"Where now?"

"I have an engagement with some friends of mine," said Matthew Kelton, "at the main gate to Oakley's estate."

As the car drew near the house of Guy Oakley, Evan Turner saw a dozen figures in khaki sitting on the wall near the gate. They sprang to attention as Matthew Kelton stopped his car.

"Boy Scouts," said Evan Turner.

"Fox Troop," said Matthew Kelton. "I'm their patron saint."

He got out of the car, and the Scouts gathered about him. Turner saw him talking to them, gesturing, and saw them listening with respectful attention. Then the Scouts trotted away into the woods which bordered the Oakley estate.

Matthew Kelton and the lawyer made their way to the spot beside the main drive where Cope's body had been found.

"If my reasoning is sound," Matthew Kelton said, "and I have rare good luck, we'll know something very soon now. While we're waiting, perhaps you'll let me say a few more words about wasps."

"I'm completely at sea, Matthew," said Evan Turner. "I haven't the least idea what you're getting at. Wasps, mouse traps, empty bird cages, Boy Scouts—now wasps again."

"I'm sane, or almost so," said Matthew Kelton, with a chuckle. "You see, Evan, the scheme of human existence is made up of a myriad of small, trifling things, each unimportant, perhaps, but all necessary to make the complete pattern. We'll start with the wasp."

He took the dead insect out of his pocket.

"This misguided creature strayed into my apiary today," he said, "and as I did not want him there, I cornered him, and took him in my hand to eject him. He flew into a rage and stung me. I was wearing gloves, fortunately. Presently, he died; but I did not kill him. He belongs to that species which can sting but once, and then dies as the result of stinging.

"Now, he knew this. Insects have curiously developed instincts, as, for example, the husband spider, who knows in advance that if he makes love to a lady of his species he is sure to be eaten by her. This wasp, I feel sure, knew that to sting me meant death to him. But his hate was stronger than his sense. Some *men* are like that, Evan."

"What are you suggesting?"

"Samson pulled down the temple on his enemies, even though he had to crush himself in doing it. Love, my dear

Evan, is strong. But there is nothing stronger in life than a good, deep-seated, robust hate. Now let's take a quick review of our case. Cope hated Oakley. Cope lived alone, and brooded. Cope had a hundred chances to shoot Oakley down in the past few years—and didn't do it.

"Why? Because Cope was both cruel and cunning. He wanted to punish Oakley; not merely kill him, but torture him. So the warped mind of Cope worked out a really brilliant scheme. Cope knew that he himself was doomed, that he would die from his disease within a year. It would be small satisfaction to murder Oakley, even if he could do it and escape detection, since Cope himself must soon follow his victim. So Cope decided that he would die, and die in such a way that Oakley would be convicted and hung for his murder—as diabolic a revenge as I ever heard of.

"Cope worked out his plan in minute and careful detail. He was the burglar who visited Oakley's house. He took the plate and jewelry for a blind. His real object was to get hold of Oakley's gun, and fire it, so that when it was found, there'd be an empty cartridge in it. Taking the black pearl stud was probably an inspiration. It would be just one more damning bit of evidence against Oakley when it was found near Cope's body.

"Then Cope picked an evening when he knew Oakley was home and alone. He may even have had the hope that Oakley would actually kill him. Oakley didn't; but Cope provoked him to shout threats and angry words, which the butler heard. Then Cope left the house when he heard the butler shaking the furnace, and shot himself a few yards from Oakley's door, with a pistol exactly like Oakley's.

"The case against Oakley was perfect. Any dumb district attorney, with such evidence, could hang Oakley. You felt that way yourself, Evan. I, myself, at first saw no chance for Oakley to clear himself. Cope had certainly put a noose around his hated enemy's neck. I only looked further into the case to please you—and because I was puzzled by a problem in psychology, namely: Was it pos-

sible for a careful, shrewd man like Oakley to commit so stupid and unplanned a crime?"

"It's an interesting theory, Matthew," said the lawyer, despondently, "but it doesn't wash. It fits into Cope's character—but, one point you can't theorize away: What became of the pistol which killed Cope? Pistols do not vanish into thin air. No weapon was found near the body, as it surely would have been, if Cope had shot himself."

"That," said Matthew Kelton, "brings me to the most ingenious part of Cope's plan, a bit of real creative imagination, Evan. Do you remember the bag of bits of meat in his pocket?"

"Yes."

"That was a clue. It caused me to hazard a fantastic guess—and I'm not sure yet I'm right. Yes—I am. Here comes one of my Boy Scouts on the run."

A bright-eyed boy came panting up, stopped, saluted.

"Well, Freddy?" said Matthew Kelton.

"Got it, sir," said the Scout.

"Take us there," directed Matthew Kelton, and he and the bewildered lawyer followed the Scout into the woods.

Fifty yards in, the Scout stopped, and pointed. The eyes of the two men saw hanging from the lower branches of a pine tree the body of a giant horned owl, two feet tall, with talons the size of a man's hand. The owl had been killed, and partly devoured by some small nocturnal climbing animal. The bird had been unable to defend itself, because a piece of twine, tied about one of its legs, had become entangled in the branches.

"Climb up and carefully release the owl," said Matthew Kelton. The Scout shinned up the tree, and presently the bird fell at the feet of the men. A piece of twine about two feet long was attached to the foot of the dead owl, and at the other end of it was a small pistol.

"It's like Oakley's!" cried Evan Turner.

"Exactly. It's a Skomak, a 'murderess'," said Matthew Kelton "And, look, Evan. The cartridge has been fired.

The bullet you have seen. It was the one which Cope fired into his own heart."

"But—how?"

Matthew Kelton held out the tiny weapon.

"See," he said, "it has a hair trigger. Goes off at a touch. Cope, who was very tall and had unusually long arms, as you may have noticed, held it at arm's length from his chest, and touched the trigger. The little pistol fell from his lifeless hand, and naturally the owl flew away, as Cope knew it would, with the pistol dangling from its foot."

Turner whistled.

"Cope," continued Matthew Kelton, "figured that the owl would head for the woods. There the pistol would be knocked off against a tree and be lost forever, or the owl would get entangled in a branch, and starve to death, or be killed, and in time the string would rot, and the pistol would drop down. Small chance of its ever being found in woods so little frequented."

"But how could Cope keep the owl quiet while he was shooting the pistol?"

"It must have been a tame owl," said Matthew Kelton. "Cope probably caught it when it was just out of the egg, and raised it for this very purpose. A methodical man, Cope. The owl was accustomed to him. He raised it on live mice. He kept it pacified last night by feeding it bits of meat. No doubt he tied it to a bush when he went in to interview Oakley."

Matthew Kilton sighed.

"Poor Cope!" he said. "Like the foolish wasp, he died for hate. I wonder if there will ever be a time when there is no hate in the world. Here, take the owl and the pistol, and go to the house and tell Oakley and the police the story. I'm going home to work on a new puzzle!"

# SINCLAIR GLUCK

## MIRAGE

CAPTAIN DUFREYNE sat in the big glass-enclosed salon of the Hotel des Rois, his long legs comfortably disposed before him, his lean, brown fingers curled tenaciously about his glass of after-luncheon coffee.

The long, lofty apartment was joyous with sunlight and warm with reflected color from the display of Eastern rugs and fabrics at the far end. And the captain was well content. He had lunched well. He was comfortable. And he was indulging two favorite hobbies at one and the same time: the bitter-sweet tang of excellent coffee was on his tongue; the veiled light of interested speculation was in his eyes.

Victim of a famous phrase concerning the passing of certain persons unnecessary to specify, Captain Dufreyne had been invalided out of the army of France many months after Verdun. Such of his friends as saw him after convalescence—and they were few—spoke of him as a changed man. There were stories—whispered stories—of a savage bitterness of spirit which had carried the discarded soldier of France into strange waters—and out again. But suddenly the stories ceased—lacking an object. For the captain had packed up one day nad disappeared from his old haunts. His friends saw him no more.

As a matter of fact the captain had drifted first to Algeria. Afterward there were many proprietors of funny little hotels in bizarre corners of the world who came to know the lean, powerful, limping figure and the bitter, weather-bronzed face.

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But since the first visit each returning Spring and tourist season found the captain in Biskra. The place and the tourists together stroked his humor almost to the point of purring—the type of purring which may or may not terminate abruptly in a savage bite. Perhaps he found the combination propitious to his peculiar gifts. The War had robbed him of a career. Biskra supplied another of sorts, sometimes enthralling if less ostensible, and considerably less glorious.

At the moment he was occupied in an unobtrusive study of a group of three people who sat facing him on a lounge at the side of the room. He was interested. His mind, in contrast to the stillness of his wasted body, was acutely active, absorbing details with an almost machine-like avidity.

The older woman he dismissed with little more than the glance which tabulated her short, voluminous person and her comfortable, insipid face. The young man who occupied the other wing of the group was the object of a longer scrutiny, skilfully interrupted before it could make itself felt, embracing now the pointed tan shoes and smart, collarless sport suit, now the sleek, dark head and the imperfectly veiled admiration in the hot-looking brown eyes as they flitted over the face of the girl beside him.

On her the captain allowed his own intermittent regard to rest longest. He took in the slender, pink-stockinged limbs crossed so carelessly—or not? He observed that the simple Spring costume looked expensive. And he studied, not without approval, the pretty, vivacious, young face, willful in repose perhaps, but now most inviting with laughter.

Finally, with the slightest lifting of his veiling brown lids, he studied the pearls which circled the slim, round throat. The sheen of refracted sunlight throbbing through the long room threw them into glowing relief against the warmer flesh. They were exceptionally lovely, those pearls. Almost certainly they were genuine.

The girl turned from her companion and swept the

sunny court beyond the windows with a lilting blue glance beneath faintly puckered brows. In a flash of insight the captain found himself abruptly in touch with her mood.

Algeria in Springtime is a land of enchantment. It is as tho all the magic potions of all the necromancers had been spilled upon the sharp blue air, to be evaporated by the profligate, all-penetrating sunlight, and wafted on sweet, uncertain breezes to the nostrils and thence to the heart of the dense but willing Occidental passing by.

It is a land of romance. And in Biskra, on the very rim of the desert, there is romance in the reposeful faces, the handsome eyes, even the strong brown hands of the stately, white-clad Arabs. There is the very color and flavor of romance in white buildings against an imperial sky, in brown mud walls, baked by the sun, set in slovenly guardianship over gardens of palms and flowering apricots and orange-trees.

Mystery and romance find subtle tongues in the rustle and stir of life behind the jealous brown walls of Arab houses. And there, beyond the palm-fringed town, are the red-brown mountains, bleak and bare, remote with long, blue shadows toward evening, lying out on the brown plains like wrinkles of deep sleep upon the hot, stark bosom of Africa.

In Biskra, reflected the captain, one felt the colorful world turning vastly beneath one. And some of the daze and dazzle of that smooth, tremendous motion had crept into the girl's blue eyes all unaware.

His glance returned to the pearls at her throat, and his lids drooped a shade lower, while into the half-obscured gray eyes crept an expression of intense concentration.

The young Frenchman was talking easily.

"But, of course!" he was saying. "It is the season devoted to removing his money from the tourist without pain."

"They do it very badly, then!" Miss Shaw retorted. "I'd pay a lot more than that to see the real thing. But I don't like fakes!"

"But you see, Mademoiselle Estelle," he explained lazily, "you wanted to see the dances, so I must take you, mustn't I?"

He smiled past her at Mrs. Shaw, and the girl gave him a swift, speculative glance which he failed to catch.

"Well, I was very much disappointed," she observed. "I thought they were going to be interesting. Instead of that you take me to see a lot of stupid street women"—a fluttering exclamation from Mrs. Shaw passed unnoticed—"who cannot dance. And now you tell me quite calmly that these dances are arranged for the tourists and aren't the real thing at all!" There was an edge to the young voice..

Briarre assumed a most penitent expression, back of which lurked a smile, "I am so sorry!" he murmured.

The girl instantly shifted her method of attack.

"I don't believe you're a bit sorry," she pouted, laughing; "and there must be something really interesting and exciting to see in a place like this!"

Philippe Briarre turned away from her, his expression lazily reflective. At once the girl's swift glance embraced the lines of his head for a vaguely acquisitive instant. The young Frenchman had for her, as for many women, very much the type of charm one feels in a slick, sturdy little horse. Lacking imagination, Estelle was apt to sweep on to the acquisitive instinct which often tries to fill its place. But his reflective mood had not escaped her.

"You were born here!" she accused suddenly. "You told me so! And you must know all about everything. But, of course, if you don't want to bother——"

The Frenchman's caressing brown eyes flashed down into hers, momentarily warming the core of a small, cool heart.

"My dear little partner, of course I know the place. And there are exciting things to see, perhaps. But——"

"But what, Philippe? And—I'm not your partner any longer, you know!"

His answering "Poor me!" brought a ripple of mirth. But the girl was not to be diverted.

"But what?" she persisted. "Anyhow, will you or won't you show me something really exciting?"

An amused regard from the expressive brown eyes failed to answer her. As she turned away they stole a glance of appreciation at the slender figure and pretty ankles.

"Well," he replied slowly. "I'll see what I can do. It may be a little dangerous, however, and your mother may not——"

"I said 'me' not 'us,' Philippe. It wouldn't amuse mother. When will you take me?"

"I cannot tell until I make same inquiries," he told her thoughtfully. "Perhaps tomorrow night——" he shook his head, frowning doubtfully.

Estelle jumped to her feet. She was daughter to a man who had known how to wait. Hence affluence and this European trip with a widowed and bewildered mother as chaperon. And she had inherited her father's gift.

"It's a promise, then!" she announced gaily. "Come on, Mama, our camels are waiting and I just love joggling about on the funny things!"

She gathered up her long, flimsy coat, and made lithely for the vestibule and the white outdoors with her two companions in tow, the one smiling, the other permanently flustered and resigned to it.

Now, the captain understood English better than he spoke it. He had overheard most of their conversation. And where he could not catch the words, his quick eyes and the expressive, mobile lips of the two young people had filled in the hiatus.

As they faded from his ken, he crossed his legs in some satisfaction. "Simple people," he reflected; "first trip, probably. Met the young fellow on the boat——"

As far as he went he was correct. The Shaws had come to London first, and after a little sightseeing had discovered that they were doing England out of season, and that every one else was fleeing the deplorable climate. They had taken a Dutch boat from Southampton to Algiers and Estelle had danced with M. Briarre and played deck-tennis with him the next day and other days, both

finding the game delightfully adapted to the display of white teeth and pretty young limbs under swirling skirts.

So the duty of escorting the young Americaine had passed smoothly out of the fluttering hands of Mrs. Shaw into the warm, brown paws of a Frenchman with an "air" and an extensive knowledge of English.

Presently the captain got to his feet, limped out of the hotel, and made his way to Count Laudin's garden, the loveliest of monuments to an ideal of natural beauty. He picked up an Arab friend there. The two found seats beside one of the clean-swept, elevated paths. And there they spent the afternoon, first in arriving at a guarded and highly confidential agreement, to judge by their carefully lowered voices, and later in that desultory philosophizing dear to the heart of Islam. But when evening began to add its scented chill to the quiet beneath the sleepy trees, he rose and limped back to the hotel.

That night the three people who had aroused his interest left the hotel together. So the captain went to bed. He was in his accustomed place with his accustomed glass of coffee on the following night. Again the two Americans and the Frenchman sat near him after dinner. And now the girl looked a little flushed. Also there was a glitter of some emotion—uneasiness perhaps—in the brown eyes of her attentive companion.

A little after nine Miss Shaw and her mother had a short discussion as to the latter's need of rest. In a few moments Mrs. Shaw said good night as gracefully as she could and left them, succumbing as usual to the stronger will of her daughter.

Half an hour later Briarre made a remark in an undertone. Estelle jumped to her feet, caught up her cloak, and made for the moonlit street, ignoring the somewhat reluctant movements of her escort.

The captain rose and limped after them. And as they moved away from the garishly Occidental hotel into the mysterious Arabian night, he stood beneath the arching

white colonnade in front of the hotel and watched them go, his eyes intent, a speculative smile on his thin lips.

Abruptly his glance met that of one of the white-clad Arabs lounging before the hotel. The man eyed him stonily for an instant, then turned and strode away, his white burnoose swinging behind him in graceful folds. So the captain went back to his seat and his second glass of coffee. There was a suppressed gleam in his own eyes now as they swept the almost deserted room.

Briarre led his companion to the rear of the hotel and into the long road, lined with mud walls, which wound its leisurely way into the three Arab villages known as old Biskra. Over the crumbling walls the palms stretched shadowy, graceful branches, as tho seeking to regard more closely the two young Occidentals who ventured by night into an alien world.

Between the fronds the moon peered down, splashing their backs with silver that clung for an inquisitive instant, then slipped to the ground behind them. The night breeze, moving softly upon some small, personal errand, carried a medley of strange, faint odors to their nostrils, whispered on either hand an instant, and passed on.

To the girl, unimaginative as she was, came a sudden lilt of excitement. An instant of clear vision, welcome in its very contrast, showed her the lawn at home, the friendly elms, the softer sunlight, even the clumsy ice-wagon, dripping its slow way along their street.

A touch on her arm, a whisper. The vision had faded.

For an instant she hesitated, her dubious glance intent upon the hand of Fatima, which spread its stubby, indented fingers on the moonlit mud wall above the yawning doorway.

"Come along," whispered Briarre.

She moved reluctantly forward into the darkness.

Suddenly a close prisoner, less from the utter obscurity than from the stifling smell, she came to an abrupt halt and stood tensely poised in indecision.

Out of the darkness ahead of her loomed the shadowy

form of Briarre. She caught her breath. He was talking to a white-clad figure which lacked a head! She caught a faint gleam of white teeth and laughed sharply. The man was a negro, waiting bareheaded in the shadowy entrance.

She felt Briarre's fingers on her arm.

"Come along, Estelle," he whispered; "it's all right, I think. They're just going to begin. But I was a fool to bring you here, all the same!"

Curiously enough, the words gave her courage. In a sense, this was more familiar ground.

"If you're afraid," she murmured disdainfully, "why did you come? Anyway, I'm going through with it now we're here! Where do we go?"

"This way!"

Stumbling over the uneven floor, she sniffed the close air of the place with curious, reluctant nostrils. Her foot struck a rough lintel, and she emerged into a ragged little court which even the flooding moonlight failed to beautify.

The flitting, white-robed figure of the negro led on into the velvet darkness of another room beyond. They followed. Now Briarre drew her slowly to the left, and they came to a halt in response to a guttural sentence in broken French, barked down at them mysteriously from the obscurity above their heads.

Briarre's warm fingers closed over hers.

"There's a sort of ladder here," he explained, directing her hand until it brushed a wooden step. "Wait, I'll strike a match!"

The flare of it showed her a steep little staircase leading into a black square out of which the teeth and eyes of the negro gleamed down at her. An obscure panic caught at her heart. But a glance at the warm, vital face of the young Frenchman beside her set the pendulum of her emotions swinging back to confidence.

She mounted lightly, looking back and down only once, to be sure that her companion was close behind.

The air was fresher in the room above. As she stepped

out upon the level floor of it she could distinguish its four bare walls by the aid of a faint orange light which stole beneath a closed door opposite. Briarre joined her.

Light streamed into their faces abruptly as the negro opened the door ahead of them. The Frenchman took her arm. And now that the darkness lay behind she walked forward calmly enough into the lighted room.

Estelle received a blurred impression of several dim lamps; of rugs and fabrics spread on the floor about the walls; of white-clad, squatting figures with startling black faces. Their guide indicated two empty chairs at the far end. They moved forward. The atmosphere of the place, heavy with smoke and incense, seemed to swirl lazily about them as they advanced.

Seated and faced about, the girl drew upon her store of conscious Anglo-Saxon superiority and peered calmly about her. Everywhere she looked she met the faint gleam of teeth and black, white-rimmed pupils fixed upon her. As her glance moved on, the smile faded slowly from each black face. But the stare remained, expressionless, almost animal in its fixed vacancy.

They had come there as spectators. But she could not shake off the feeling that she and her companion had been thrust, at least temporarily, into the rôle of performers, this ring of animal faces their incalculable audience.

They were alone at this end of the room, the blacks squatting on their haunches or seated cross-legged about the other three sides. Estelle noticed a particularly dark-faced Arab, pock-marked, down-looking, seated, and leaning back against the wall to her left. He reminded her of a depressed-looking vulture she had once seen. A considerable space separated him from the nearest negro.

In the far corner a tom-tom burst into a blare of sound then settled to a steady throbbing, the resonant din dashing and clashing through the little room, until the thick, confined air seemed writhing alive with it. An infernal, squealing bray swung abruptly into rough step with the

drum, making a combined assault upon her sensitive Western ears.

"For Heaven's sake, what is it?" she cried.

Briarre leaned over until his lips touched the curling fringe of her bobbed hair.

"Sort of Sudanese bagpipe," he explained, "made out of goatskin. Look! they're going to begin now!"

The Arab had made an abrupt gesture. Four of the black men rose to their feet and stepped forward. They faced one another for a moment, then began a series of clumsy movements, vague and apparently meaningless. She looked in vain for any sign of self-consciousness in their faces, any sign of a definite purpose or symbolism in the dance. Their features were set and expressionless. In the slowly rolling eyes was visible only a dull, inward contemplation.

One by one other negroes joined them, stamping and bending forward, flinging out their elbows in grotesque gestures, bending far back.

The beat of the tom-tom quickened. The tormented clamor of the bagpipe rose half a dozen notes in pitch and squealed on to a quicker measure aimlessly rising and falling.

The dance quickened too. Dust contended with smoke and incense and noise for possession of the overladen air. Some one from the far end had moved forward with a number of sticks. He was gliding in and out among the dancers, distributing his burden. The sticks were accepted absently, the negroes holding them out from their bodies as they danced, as tho uncertain what to do with them.

One of the pendent weapons swung out and thumped against a brown limb. There was a flurry of swift movement. The sticks began to flash, cracking against other sticks, thumping on muscular bodies.

Inarticulate cries, brief, lamenting howls, punctuated the rhythm of the dance. Sweat shone on the foreheads of the dancers and drew glistening scars down their black, distorted faces.

The place was stifling.

Again the dance quickened. Like men in a daze, the negroes dispersed to the sides of the room, flung down their sticks, tore off their turbans and burnooses.

In an instant they had assembled again, stark and repellent in loin-cloths only, their shining muscular bodies swaying and jerking to the throbbing clamor of the tom-tom and bagpipe, their faces savage and intent. Each carried a tiny knife. The dance began again, the knives flashing dimly.

The white girl shrank close to her escort. "Let's go now," she whispered. "I don't like it very much. I've seen enough. What are they going to do now, Philippe?"

"Wait," he counseled quickly; "You wanted to see the real thing. This is it! Watch them!"

Estelle's reluctant glance returned to the glistening, savage faces of the dancers. They were leaping now, waving their little knives in the air, drawing slowly nearer.

Her eyes recoiled from a naked, muscular body.

Suddenly she gasped and shrank back. One of the negroes had stabbed himself in the leg, and the blood was oozing in a slow, shining stream that jerked nearer his foot with each leap. Now he clapped his hand to the wound, and with a howl drew his palm down across his mouth, eagerly lapping the crimson moisture.

Shuddering, she turned to look at the others. They, too, had begun to stab themselves. To her nostrils came the odor of sweat and the sickening blood-scent. They were close to her.

Directly in front of her danced a giant of a man. Her fascinated glance was drawn to his face. Unlike the others, his eyes were intent on hers.

Stark panic seized her. She leaped to her feet and away from him, catching at Briarre's arm with both hands.

"Tell them to stop!" she cried, shuddering. "I want to go home."

"Hush!" he interrupted softly. "Sit down! You'll make trouble! Look!"

She turned her head, engulfed in a wave of terror.

The giant negro stood before her, his bloodshot eyes savagely intent on hers, his flat nostrils dilated like those of a running horse.

"Sit down," came an urgent whisper. "Clap your hands!"

Estelle sank into her chair again, her terrified brain automatically registering his commands. But applause was beyond her.

Her hypnotized regard fixed on the savage face of the negro, she heard Briarre clapping his hands encouragingly. But the big Sudanese still towered above her. His heaving naked breast, streaked with blood and sweat, shut out her view, shut out everything.

Abruptly the black hulk of the man swerved and receded to a vast distance. Lights and color and clamoring din rushed together like contending waves, crested—faded—were engulfed.

With a little moan she slipped from her chair and lay, a limp, huddled figure, on the dusty floor.

Eons later she found herself drifting upward out of some vast, dim gulf. A shadowy figure floated beside her. She was aware of kisses—kisses disturbingly convincing from anything so nebulous. She opened her eyes. And that momentary impression of kisses was swept away in a flood of sickening recollection.

She lay huddled together on a rug. Briarre was bending above her. She saw that one end of his collar stuck out from the side of his neck. It gave him a surprisingly dissipated appearance. She raised her head a little. The Frenchman's hair and clothing were disheveled, in strong contrast to his usual neatness. Her glance passed on, to encounter four brownish walls very close to them, for the room was tiny.

She raised herself on one elbow, and Briarre sat back on his heels. They stared at each other.

"What—what happened?"

"You're all right now?—not hurt?" he countered.

She shook her head.

"We're in a bit of a box!" he volunteered, giving her a wry smile. "I paid them well to do that dance for us. But they're as sensitive as children—and as irresponsible!"

"But—I don't understand. . . ."

"They were worked up, excited, Estelle! You offended them, you see. That big negro was only showing his resentment. I realize that now. But when you fainted I'm afraid I lost my head a bit. Anyhow, I knocked him down. Then the lot of them fell on me. I hadn't much chance, of course. They were half drunk, knives were flashing, and things began to look ugly. So—I surrendered!"

He grinned uncomfortably. "As it was, I was lucky to get out with a whole skin!"

"But—where are we?"

"Same house. They carted us in here, all jabbering at once, and left us. By the sounds they've gone on with their dance. I shouldn't have trusted that swine of an Arab. Left alone, I don't believe the blacks would have dared go any further. As it was, they took every cent I had on me, and I'm afraid they've got your necklace and rings. I'm sure the Arab engineered that part of it. But I'll make them regret this as long as they live, if it takes me a year!"

Estelle's hand flew to her throat. The necklace was gone. She saw that her fingers were bare of rings. But the recollection of that huge negro—the knowledge that she was still in the same house with him—loomed infinitely darker than her loss.

"You don't mean we're prisoners!" she whispered.

"For to-night, I'm afraid. To-morrow they'll come to their senses and realize the trouble they're laying up for themselves."

"But—what do they want with us?"

Estelle got to her feet and ran to the rough door. It was locked. She whirled on Briarre, her pretty face drawn and bitter with fear.

"What are they going to do to us?" she moaned. Briarre caught her hands. "Don't be frightened!" he urged. "We are in a civilized country under the French Government. It won't take those negroes long to come to their senses."

"But—suppose they kill us, Philippe?" she moaned. "Philippe, what are we going to do?"

The young Frenchman turned away and began automatically adjusting his disheveled attire. He tried to hide the gravity of his expression in a smile as he faced her again.

"There's nothing we can do but wait."

As he spoke the latch of the door rattled. Estelle caught at and clung to his arm, her wide eyes on the slowly moving door.

It swung open at last. Framed in the doorway, his arms folded, stood the powerful-looking Arab who had directed the dance. The man's dark, threatening glance moved from Briarre's face to the girl's and back again. He moved slowly forward into the room, closing the door behind him.

They faced him in silence. In a moment he began to speak to Briarre in guttural French. Estelle's companion answered him calmly at first, then with a threat in his eyes and voice. The Arab shook his head. He spoke again. Briarre answered him in a flood of fierce words. Then they both began to talk at once, gesticulating, their voices loud and furious.

Estelle could grasp only a word here and there, for she knew little French. She thought the Arab was urging something and Briarre angrily refusing. It came home to her that her fate depended upon the tact and cunning of this excited young Frenchman.

"Oh, what is it?" she cried. "What does he want?"

Briarre caught the note of helpless terror in her voice. His eyes flashed; and with a sudden little spring he flung himself forward at the Arab's throat.

Small hands to her cheeks, Estelle retreated to the wall

and crouched there, her wide, fascinated gaze never leaving the two men as they struggled and strained together, now almost motionless, now darting into swift movement, as one or other sought to shift his grip. She caught the growling and grunting of each combatant and cowered as they struggled. She shrank to the glint of intent savage eyes.

Swiftly, so swiftly that she saw only a blur of movement, the Arab gave ground, tripped and fell with a crash. His burnoose momentarily enveloped his opponent. But Briarre thrust it aside, and she saw that his knees were on the arms of the Arab, his fingers fast about the man's throat.

Squirming and twisting, his loose garments half-way up his naked brown legs, the man tried in vain to loosen the Frenchman's grip. Some primitive spot in Estelle's being drifted uppermost, and watched his tongue protrude, watched the ferocity fade to despair and terror in the man's black eyes. Now the eyes rolled upward, horribly—

With a tiny shriek Estelle ran forward and plucked at the Frenchman's arm.

"Stop! You'll kill him!"

Half dazed, he looked up at her, then stiffly loosened his grip and sprang to his feet.

"Quick, then!"

He ran to the door. Estelle was close at his heels. Abruptly he turned on her.

"Wait. Stay here until I see if the coast is clear. No good running into the pack of them."

"Oh! Don't leave me alone with that——"

"Wait, I say!"

Involuntarily she fell back. Briarre opened the door cautiously, then darted through, closing it softly behind him.

Close against the wall again Estelle waited, her reluctant gaze on the Arab's distorted, motionless face. Moment after moment passed in silence, except for the slow rattle and wheeze from the man's laboring lungs.

The door creaked on its hinges suddenly, bringing a

smothered cry to her lips. Briarre darted into the room and caught her hand, then loosened her fingers abruptly, ran to the Arab and stripped off his burnoose, fumbling the limp figure over and over in the dust. In an instant he had stepped into it.

"Come on," he whispered.

Hand in hand the two crept through the door into the musty darkness of another room. Estelle followed blindly the guidance of his hand, her heart in her mouth.

They were in a third room now. Here the girl discerned a faint streak of moonlight stealing through a chink in the wall. Curiously, that one pale ray restored her courage. For the moonlight seemed to whisper: "This is no limitless cavern of darkness and horror, but only a tumbledown Arab house with boarded windows. Safety and civilization are close at hand!"

From somewhere behind them came a murmur of voices and a muffled stamping of feet. But Estelle realized suddenly that she had been hearing these vague sounds all along.

Briarre had opened a door into a room that was pale and mysterious with reflected moonlight. In an instant they were across it and stumbling out upon a flat roof, the pale moon eying them curiously, the vaster night sky arching above them.

Staring down and along, the Frenchman led her to a rough flight of mud steps. A moment later they were in the little court.

Now came a groping, hurried progress through that dark, ill-smelling entrance, and the door swung reluctantly open, setting them free at last to the moonlight and the world of outdoors.

Still without venturing to speak, Briarre drew the girl close to his side, so that the voluminous burnoose almost enveloped her, and set off at a brisk, stumbling pace for the hotel, his arm about her waist.

They hurried along in silence until the walls of Vieux Biskra no longer rose about them. Now Briarre slackened his pace a little and looked up.

A cloud had momentarily obscured the moon.

"Look," he whispered, "rain-clouds, Estelle! 'C'est L'or qui tombe!' That's what the Arabs say when it rains, dear. 'It is gold falling!' For it is a bitter, barren country this. And, by Jove, you've tasted the flavor of it tonight!"

But Estelle, frightened at the sudden darkness, had looked back. And she caught at his arm in sudden terror.

"Philippe! Someone's after us! Look!"

He whirled in time to catch a glimpse of a flitting white figure, just vanishing behind a jutting wall. Otherwise the road they had taken was empty and still. Again he drew her close to him and they hurried along in apprehensive silence, stumbling and glancing back at brief intervals, until the roofs of the larger hotels came into sight, gleaming white in the moonlight for the cloud had passed.

Now Briarre stopped, flung off the burnoose, and tossed it over the mud wall which lined the road.

"There," he cried, using the garment as a symbol, "we're well out of that! I was mad to take you there at all!" His voice was harsh with self-reproach.

Estelle looked up at him, her eyes dreamy. The spell of the adventure still gripped her senses. Freedom and safety were sweet.

"Never mind," she whispered, "you got me out again! You were just wonderful!"

Abruptly, hungrily, he stooped and kissed her. But she pushed him away.

"The hotel! Please!" she murmured confusedly.

Recognizing the promise in her words, Briarre caught her hand close in his and strode on.

It was not yet eleven when the two entered the hotel. But the long salon was deserted except for the slouching figure of Captain Dufreyne, seated in his usual chair and staring aimlessly at the wall.

He looked up at them as they entered, and they moved down the room toward him, their pace abruptly slow and uncertain. For each had hoped to find the place deserted.

Under half-closed lids the captain studied the girl. He saw that her neck was bare of pearls and his eyes gleamed suddenly. Then, like a man well satisfied with his day's work, he leaned back in his chair and tactfully closed his eyes.

Briarre was cursing under his breath. Now he drew the girl to a halt and swung her round to face him.

"Look here," he whispered, "my room is just beyond that door. We can't talk here. Could you . . ."

Estelle had not yet returned to her normal daytime point of view. Her blood was singing in her veins, sweetly, confusedly.

"But, of course—for a minute!" she murmured.

He turned at once and she followed him glancing nonchalantly about her as tho she had never been there before.

In a moment they passed out of the door which led to the long hotel hallway. But the captain did not stir, did not even trouble to open his eyes as they disappeared.

Briarre closed and locked his bedroom door behind them, then turned with a whimsical smile.

"Not to keep you in," he explained, "but to keep any one else out."

She nodded, facing him uncertainly. He moved vaguely nearer, and she began to speak hurriedly.

"Tell me," she urged, "tell me what he wanted, that Arab? I could not follow, you spoke so fast!"

Briarre hesitated and came to a halt before her. The light in his eyes faded a little as his thoughts reverted from the delectable present to their recent adventure.

"Wanted to keep us prisoners there until I gave him a letter to the manager of the hotel, asking for five thousand francs. Otherwise they would cart us off into the desert. But the scheme went wrong!"

He laughed with a note of triumph.

Estelle vaguely recalled the repetition of the words "cinq milles" in their momentous conversation.

"But they would be caught afterward!"

Briarre shook his head.

"Not so easy! That Arab travels light, I imagine. He would be far away in the desert by morning. And the negroes are just nomads, here to-day and gone to-morrow. Anyhow, how many of them could we describe accurately, or even identify? They look so much alike."

"But my pearls, then!" cried the girl suddenly, "and my rings!"

Briarre's young face hardened. "Don't you worry! I'll get your trinkets back for you to-morrow, or know the reason why!"

"Trinkets!" she cried. "Do you call pearls and emeralds and diamonds 'trinkets'?" There was an edge to her voice.

Briarre stared up at her. "Pearls!" he repeated stupidly. "Do you mean to say that necklace was real?—and you wore it to a place like that?"

"Of course they're real—and extremely valuable!" cried Estelle. "So are my rings."

She watched the blank astonishment on his face turn swiftly to consternation and then to grim purpose. And as she looked she noticed, for the first time, the ugly, swollen bruise above his temple. A swift revulsion swept over her, bringing a soft glow to her eyes.

"This business was bad enough," Briarre was muttering, "but to have you lose something of value through me——"

He eyed her with a sudden hunger, then moved past her toward the door. Estelle caught at his arm.

"Wait! Where are you going?" she whispered.

"I'm going back to get those 'trinkets'!" he burst out bitterly. "I'll buy them or take them by force."

"And leave me here?" she laughed, adding more softly, "like this?"

He looked down into her eyes. His own blazed suddenly plunging deep into the answering glow he saw there. In an instant she was in his arms.

Her eyes closed. Her head fell back. And her pretty pallid face assumed an expression curiously, remotely

bitter as she surrendered lips and eyes and cheeks to his kisses.

Suddenly they stiffened, eyed each other, then sprang apart in consternation.

Some one was knocking softly at the door. And at the same instant both realized that the knocking had been going on for some moments—was growing louder.

Briarre stared about the room, his eyes wild with alarm. "Quick," he whispered, pointing to the tiny bathroom, the open doorway of which was covered by a curtain. "Get in there until I see what it is!"

Estelle ran past him and disappeared. He turned, looked over his shoulder until he saw that the concealing curtain had ceased to move, and then unlocked his door, flinging it wide.

"Eh bien?" he began sharply, adding in swift surprise "Monsieur?"

Captain Dufreyne bowed and advanced into the room in his best grand manner. In spite of himself the younger man stood aside.

"I haf comb," explained the captain in broken but courteous English, "to spik of pearls!"

Wrath and amazement fought for supremacy on Briarre's face. "Quoi?" he ejaculated.

There was a gleam of sardonic humor in the captain's gray eyes as he repeated his remark—slowly and distinctly.

Briarre drew himself up, his face dangerous.

"If this is a joke——" he began.

But he never finished his sentence. The captain's long arm darted forward, there was a flurry of movement, and with a howl of anguish Briarre found himself facing away from the intruder, his arm painfully twisted and helpless behind him. He gave vent to another howl, this time of rage, as he felt the captain's free hand fumbling at his pockets.

But when, out of the tail of his eye, he saw the necklace flash into the air and dangle, gleaming, from the cap-

tain's brown fingers, he began to curse, softly, steadily, in a vitriolic stream hardly louder than a whisper.

"Now," interrupted Captain Dufreyne pleasantly, "we go to ze managaire! And we leaf the door open, not? Zere is nozzing longer to hide! So—now—any person can pass in—or out. Eh, mon ami?"

There was a sound of heavy breathing for a moment, then a retreating shuffle of feet. Estelle peered out into an empty room.

An instant later she had slipped into the hall and away.

After breakfast next morning the captain had hardly settled himself in his accustomed place when the door from the hall opened to admit two porters laden with luggage. They were followed by a smart-looking but slightly pallid young Frenchman.

The eyes of the two Frenchmen met. And the lips of the departing guest bubbled with a scalding, searing observation only just audible. The captain rose to his feet with surprising lightness and agility. Whereupon Briarre favored him with a single venomous glance and scuttled out in pursuit of his luggage.

Half an hour later the captain glanced up to find the girl standing before him. He sprang courteously to his feet and bowed.

"I came to thank you for my jewels!" she explained breathlessly. "The manager returned them to me this morning!"

"Please!" he deprecated, "eet ees nozzing."

"Oh, but it is!" she urged. "I never dreamed——" she broke off in confusion.

The captain smiled down at her. "You see," he explained, "I deed not lak hees face."

"But how could you know? How did you guess that he had my things?"

"Zat was not guess, Mademoiselle! I know somezing of dis Arab. Wiz him he talk long tam yesterday. So—I send a man to—look over you last night. Zat was all arrange', dance an' everything! He deed not hurt his frien' ze

Arab. When he lef' you for a moment after, a black was waiting to give him ze jewels. Zat was arrange' because —you might not become fainted!"

Estelle dropped her eyes, shuddered.

"But—I sink he would haf return' dem to-day," the captain hurried on. "I sink—it is you he want, Mademoiselle! Onlee—he mak' sure of you—or ze jewels, is it not?"

Estelle looked up. It was easy to see that she had been crying. And there was a gentle, comprehending light in the eyes smiling down at her.

Estelle observed that the captain was very good looking. He had an "air."

She looked away and back again. Into the sweetness of her smile had crept an acquisitive gleam not altogether unfamiliar to the captain.

"But you are simply wonderful!" she breathed. "And it was so amazingly kind of you to take so much interest in—poor little me!" Her glance, faintly provocative, met his eyes for an instant, then swerved over his bronzed face, absorbing it swiftly.

Slowly, perhaps with reluctance, the captain's manner became inordinately polite.

"Bot you do not onnerstan', Miss!" he smiled. "Eet ees my—duty!"

Estelle gasped.

"A—a detective?"

The captain bowed.

"Oh! Oh, I see," she faltered. "But then—you—I must reward you—oh!" she broke off and turned away.

"Not necessity, Miss," returned the captain softly. "I am well paid. But—somezing for ze ozzer employes, eef you lak—in ze manager's box, n'est ce pas?"

"I will, of course," Estelle assured him rapidly. She began to move away, hesitated, spoke over her shoulder.

"Thank you very much," she said faintly.

"Eet ees pleasure!" the captain assured the back of her head.

Alone again, he moved to the side of the room and rang a bell. A waiter popped into sight.

"Café noir," said the captain briefly, and resumed his seat. His favorite drink possessed a faintly bitter flavor most eminently suited to his mood.

# EDGAR JEPSON AND ROBERT EUSTACE

## THE TEA-LEAF

ARTHUR KELSTERN and George Willoughton met in the Turkish bath in Duke Street, St. James's, and rather more than a year later in that Turkish bath they parted. Both of them were bad-tempered men, Kelstern cantankerous and Willoughton violent. It was indeed difficult to decide which was the worse-tempered; and when I found that they had suddenly become friends, I gave that friendship three months. It lasted nearly a year.

When they did quarrel they quarrelled about Kelstern's daughter Ruth. Willoughton fell in love with her and she with him and they became engaged to be married. Six months later, in spite of the fact that they were plainly very much in love with one another, the engagement was broken off. Neither of them gave any reason for breaking it off. My belief was that Willoughton had given Ruth a taste of his infernal temper and got as good as he gave.

Not that Ruth was at all a Kelstern to look at. Like the members of most of the old Lincolnshire families, descendants of the Vikings and the followers of Canute, one Kelstern is very like another Kelstern, fair-haired, clear-skinned, with light blue eyes and a good bridge to the nose. But Ruth had taken after her mother: she was dark with a straight nose, dark-brown eyes of the kind often described as liquid, dark-brown hair, and as kissable lips as ever I saw. She was a proud, rather self-sufficing, high-spirited girl, with a temper of her own. She needed it to live with that cantankerous old brute Kelstern. Oddly enough in spite of the fact that he always would try to bully her, she was fond of him; and I will say

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for him that he was very fond of her. Probably she was the only creature in the world of whom he was really fond. He was an expert in the application of scientific discoveries to industry; and she worked with him in his laboratory. He paid her five hundred a year, so that she must have been uncommonly good.

He took the breaking off of the engagement very hard indeed. He would have it that Willoughton had jilted her. Ruth took it hard too: her warm colouring lost some of its warmth; her lips grew less kissable and set in a thinner line. Willoughton's temper grew worse than ever; he was like a bear with a perpetually sore head. I tried to feel my way with both him and Ruth with a view to help to bring about a reconciliation. To put it mildly, I was rebuffed. Willoughton swore at me; Ruth flared up and told me not to meddle in matters that didn't concern me. Nevertheless my strong impression was that they were missing one another badly and would have been glad enough to come together again if their stupid vanity could have let them.

Kelstern did his best to keep Ruth furious with Willoughton. One night I told him—it was no business of mine; but I never did give a tinker's curse for his temper—that he was a fool to meddle and had much better leave them alone. It made him furious, of course; he would have it that Willoughton was a dirty hound and a low blackguard—at least those were about the mildest things he said of him. It struck me of a sudden that there must be something much more serious in the breaking off of the engagement than I had guessed.

That suspicion was strengthened by the immense trouble Kelstern took to injure Willoughton. At his clubs, the Athenæum, the Devonshire, and the Savile, he would display an astonishing ingenuity in bringing the conversation round to Willoughton; then he would declare that he was a scoundrel and a blackguard of the meanest type. Of course it did Willoughton harm, though not nearly as much harm as Kelstern desired, for Willoughton knew his job as few engineers knew it; and it is very hard indeed

to do much harm to a man who really knows his job. People have to have him. But of course it did him some harm; and Willoughton knew that Kelstern was doing it. I came across two men who told me that they had given him a friendly hint. That did not improve Willoughton's temper.

An expert in the construction of those ferro-concrete buildings which are rising up all over London, he was as distinguished in his sphere as Kelstern in his. They were alike not only in the matters of brains and bad temper; but I think that their minds worked in very much the same way. At any rate both of them seemed determined not to change their ordinary course of life because of the breaking off of that engagement.

It had been the habit of both of them to have a Turkish bath, at the baths in Duke Street, at four in the afternoon on the second and last Tuesday in every month. To that habit they stuck. The fact that they must meet on those Tuesdays did not cause either of them to change his hour of taking his Turkish bath by the twenty minutes which would have given them no more than a passing glimpse of one another. They continued to take it, as they always had, simultaneously. Thick-skinned? They were thick-skinned. Neither of them pretended that he did not see the other; he scowled at him; and he scowled at him most of the time. I know this, for sometimes I had a Turkish bath myself at that hour.

It was about three months after the breaking off of the engagement that they met for the last time at that Turkish bath, and there parted for good.

Kelstern had been looking ill for about six weeks: there was a grayness and a drawn look to his face; and he was losing weight. On the second Tuesday in October he arrived at the bath punctually at four, bringing with him, as was his habit, a thermos flask full of a very delicate China tea. If he thought that he was not perspiring freely enough he would drink it in the hottest room; if he did perspire freely enough, he would drink it after his bath. Willoughton arrived about two minutes later. Kelstner fin-

ished undressing and went into the bath a couple of minutes before Willoughton. They stayed in the hot room about the same time; Kelstern went into the hottest room about a minute after Willoughton. Before he went into it he sent for his thermos flask which he had left in the dressingroom and took it into the hottest room with him.

As it happened, they were the only two people in the hottest room; and they had not been in it two minutes before the four men in the hot room heard them quarrelling. They heard Kelstern call Willoughton a dirty hound and a low blackguard, among other things, and declare he would do him in yet. Willoughton told him to go to the devil twice. Kelstern went on abusing him and presently Willoughton fairly shouted: "Oh, shut up, you old fool! Or I'll make you!"

Kelstern did not shut up. About two minutes later Willoughton came out of the hottest room, scowling, walked through the hot room into the shampooing room and put himself into the hands of one of the shampooers. Two or three minutes after that a man of the name of Helston went into the hottest room and fairly yelled. Kelstern was lying back on a blood-drenched couch, with the blood still flowing from a wound over his heart.

There was a devil of a hullabaloo. The police were called in; Willoughton was arrested. Of course he lost his temper and, protesting furiously that he had had nothing whatever to do with the crime, abused the police. That did not incline them to believe him.

After examining the room and the dead body the detective-inspector in charge of the case came to the conclusion that Kelstern had been stabbed as he was drinking his tea. The thermos flask lay on the floor in front of him and some of the tea had evidently been spilt, for some tea-leaves—the tea in the flask must have been carelessly strained off the leaves by the maid who filled it—lay on the floor about the mouth of the empty flask. It looked as if the murderer had taken advantage of Kelstern's drinking his tea to stab him while the flask rather blocked his

vision and prevented him from seeing what he would be at.

The case would have been quite plain sailing but for the fact that they could not find the weapon. It had been easy enough for Willoughton to take it into the bath in the towel in which he was draped. But how had he got rid of it? Where had he hidden it? A Turkish bath is no place to hide anything in. It is as bare as an empty barn —if anything barer; and Willoughton had been in the barest part of it. The police searched every part of it— not that there was much point in doing that, for Willoughton had come out of the hottest room, and gone through the hot room into the shampooers' room. When Helston started shouting murder, Willoughton had rushed back with the shampooers to the hottest room and there he had stayed. Since it was obvious that he had committed the murder the shampooers and the bathers had kept their eyes on him. They were all of them certain that he had not left them to go to the dressingrooms; they would not have allowed him to do so.

It was obvious that he must have carried the weapon into the bath, hidden in the folds of the towel in which he was draped, and brought it away in the folds of that towel. He had laid the towel down beside the couch on which he was being shampooed; and there it still lay when they came to look for it, untouched, with no weapon in it, with no traces of blood on it. There was not much in the fact that it was not stained with blood, since Willoughton could have wiped the knife, or dagger, or whatever weapon he used, on the couch on which Kelstern lay. There were no marks of any such wiping on the couch; but the blood, flowing from the wound, might have covered them up.

There was no finding the weapon; and its disappearance puzzled the police and later puzzled the public.

Then the doctors who made the autopsy came to the conclusion that the wound had been inflicted by a circular, pointed weapon nearly three-quarters of an inch in diameter. It had penetrated rather more than three inches

and supposing that its handle was only four inches long it must have been a sizeable weapon, quite impossible to overlook. The doctors also discovered a further proof of the theory that Kelstern had been drinking his tea when he was stabbed. Half-way down the wound they found two halves of a tea-leaf which had evidently fallen on to Kelstern's body, been driven into the wound and cut in half by the weapon. Also they discovered that Kelstern was suffering from cancer. This fact was not published in the papers; I heard it at the Devonshire.

Willoughton was brought before the magistrates and to most people's surprise did not reserve his defense. He went into the witness box and swore that he had never touched Kelstern, that he had never had anything to touch him with, that he had never taken any weapon into the Turkish bath and so had had no weapon to hide, that he had never even seen any such weapon as the doctors described. He was committed for trial.

The papers were full of the crime; every one was discussing it; and the question which occupied every one's mind was: where had Willoughton hidden the weapon? People wrote to the papers to suggest that he had ingeously put it in some place under everybody's eyes and that it had been overlooked because it was so obvious. Others suggested that, circular and pointed, it must be very like a thick lead pencil, that it was a thick lead pencil; and that was why the police had overlooked it in their search. The police had not overlooked any thick lead pencil; there had been no thick lead pencil to overlook. They hunted England through—Willoughton did a lot of motoring—to discover the man who had sold him this curious and uncommon weapon. They did not find the man who had sold it to him; they did not find a man who sold such weapons at all. They came to the conclusion that Kelstern had been murdered with a piece of a steel, or iron, rod filed to a point like a pencil.

In spite of the fact that only Willoughton *could* have murdered Kelstern, I could not believe that he had done it. The fact that Kelstern was doing his best to injure him

professionally and socially was by no means a strong enough motive. Willoughton was far too intelligent a man not to be very well aware that people do not take much notice of statements to the discredit of a man whom they need to do a job for them; and for the social injury he would care very little. Besides, he might very well injure, or even kill, a man in one of his tantrums; but his was not the kind of bad temper that plans a cold-blooded murder; and if ever a murder had been deliberately planned, Kelstern's had.

I was as close a friend as Willoughton had, and I went to visit him in prison. He seemed rather touched by my doing so, and grateful. I learnt that I was the only person who had done so. He was subdued and seemed much gentler. It might last. He discussed the murder readily enough and naturally with an harassed air. He said quite frankly that he did not expect me, in the circumstances, to believe that he had not committed it; but he had not, and he could not for the life of him conceive who had. I did believe that he had not committed it; there was something in his way of discussing it that wholly convinced me. I told him that I was quite sure that he had not killed Kelstern; and he looked at me as if he did not believe the assurance. But again he looked grateful.

Ruth was grieving for her father; but Willoughton's very dangerous plight to some degree distracted her mind from her loss. A woman can quarrel with a man bitterly without desiring to see him hanged; and Willoughton's chance of escaping hanging was not at all a good one. But she would not believe for a moment that he had murdered her father.

"No; there's nothing in it—nothing whatever," she said firmly. "If Dad had murdered Hugh I could have understood it. He had reasons—or at any rate he had persuaded himself that he had. But whatever reason had Hugh for murdering Dad? It's all nonsense to suppose that he'd mind Dad's trying all the knew to injure him, as much as that. All kinds of people are going about trying to injure other people in that way, but they don't really

injure them very much; and Hugh knows that quite well."

"Of course they don't; and Hugh wouldn't really believe that your father was injuring him much," I said. "But you're forgetting his infernal temper."

"No: I'm not," she protested. "He might kill a man in one of his rages on the spur of the moment. But this wasn't the spur of the moment. Whoever did it had worked the whole thing out and came along with the weapon ready."

I had to admit that that was reasonable enough. But who had done it? I pointed out to her that the police had made careful enquiries about every one in the bath at the time, the shampooers and the people taking their baths, but they had found no evidence whatever that any one of them had at any time had any relations, except that of shampooer, with her father.

"Either it was one of them, or somebody else who just did it and got right away, or there's a catch somewhere," she said frowning thoughtfully.

"I can't see how there can possibly have been any one in the bath, except the people who are known to have been there," said I. "In fact, there can't have been."

Then the Crown subpœnaed her as a witness for the prosecution. It seemed rather unnecessary and even a bit queer, for it could have found plenty of evidence of bad blood between the two men without dragging her into it. Plainly it was bent on doing all it knew to prove motive enough. Ruth seemed more upset by the prospect of going into the witness-box than I should have expected her to be. But then she had been having a very trying time.

On the morning of the trial I called for her after breakfast to drive her down to the New Bailey. She was pale and looked as if she had had a poor night's rest, and, naturally enough, she seemed to be suffering from an excitement she had to control. It was not like her to show any excitement she might be feeling.

We had of course been in close touch with Willoughton's solicitor, Hamley; and he had kept seats for us

just behind him. He wished to have Ruth at hand to consult should some point turn up on which she could throw light, since she knew more than any one about the relations between Willoughton and her father. I had timed our arrival very well; the jury had just been sworn in. Of course the Court was full of women, the wives of Peers and bookmakers and politicians, most of them overdressed and overscented.

Then the judge came in; and with his coming the atmosphere of the Court became charged with that sense of anxious strain peculiar to trials for murder. It was rather like the atmosphere of a sick room in a case of fatal illness, but worse.

It was unfortunate for Willoughton that the judge was Garbould. A hard-faced, common-looking fellow, and coarse in the grain, he has a well-founded reputation as a hanging judge and the habit of acting as an extra counsel for the prosecution.

Willoughton came into the box, looking under the weather and very much subdued. But he certainly looked dignified and he said that he was not guilty in a steady enough voice.

Greatorex, the leading Counsel for the Crown, opened the case for the prosecution. There was no suggestion in his speech that the Police had discovered any new fact.

Then Helston gave evidence of finding the body of the dead man and he and the other three men who had been with him in the hot room gave evidence of the quarrel they had overheard between Willoughton and the dead man, and that Willoughton came out of the hottest room, scowling and obviously furious. One of them, a fussy old gentleman of the name of Underwood, declared that it was the bitterest quarrel he had ever heard. None of the four of them could throw any light on the matter of whether Willoughton was carrying the missing weapon in the folds of the towel in which he was draped; all of them were sure that he had nothing in his hands.

The medical evidence came next. In cross-examining the doctors who had made the autopsy, Hazeldean, Wil-

loughton's counsel, established the fact quite definitely that the missing weapon was of a fair size; that its rounded blade must have been over half an inch in diameter and between three and four inches long. They were of the opinion that to drive a blade of that thickness into the heart, a handle of at least four inches in length would be necessary to give a firm enough grip. It might have been a piece of a steel, or iron, rod sharpened like a pencil. At any rate it was certainly a sizeable weapon, not one to be hidden quickly, or to disappear wholly in a Turkish bath. Hazeldean could not shake their evidence about the tea-leaf; they were confident that it had been driven into the wound and cut in half by the blade of the missing weapon, and that that went to show that the wound had been inflicted while Kelstern was drinking his tea.

Detective-Inspector Brackett, who was in charge of the case, was cross-examined at great length about his search for the missing weapon. He made it quite clear that it was nowhere in that Turkish bath, neither in the hot rooms, nor the shampooing room, nor the dressingrooms, nor the vestibule, nor the office. He had had the plunge bath emptied; he had searched the roofs, though it was practically certain that the skylight above the hot room, not the hottest, had been shut at the time of the crime. In re-examination he scouted the idea of Willoughton's having had an accomplice who had carried away the weapon for him. He had gone into that matter most carefully.

The shampooer stated that Willoughton came to him scowling so savagely that he wondered what had put him into such a bad temper. In cross-examining him Arbuthnot, Hazeldean's junior, made it clearer than ever that, unless Willoughton had already hidden the weapon in the bare hottest room, it was hidden in the towel. Then he drew from the shampooer the definite statement that Willoughton had set down the towel beside the couch on which he was shampooed, that he had hurried back to the hot rooms in front of the shampooer; that the shampooer had come back from the hot rooms, leaving Willoughton

still in them discussing the crime, to find the towel lying just as Willoughton had set it down, with no weapon in it and no trace of blood on it.

Since the Inspector had disposed of the possibility that an accomplice had slipped in, taken the weapon from the towel, and slipped out of the bath with it, this evidence really made it clear that the weapon had never left the hottest room.

Then the prosecution called evidence of the bad terms on which Kelstern and Willoughton had been. Three well-known and influential men told the jury about Kelstner's efforts to prejudice Willoughton in their eyes and the damaging statements he had made about him. One of them had felt it to be his duty to tell Willoughton about this; and Willoughton had been very angry. Arbuthnot, in cross-examining, elicited the fact that any damaging statement that Kelstern made about any one was considerably discounted by the fact that every one knew him to be in the highest degree cantankerous.

I noticed that during the end of the cross-examination of the shampooer and during this evidence, Ruth had been fidgetting and turning to look impatiently at the entrance to the Court, as if she were expecting some one. Then, just as she was summoned to the witness box, there came in a tall, stooping, grey-headed, grey-bearded man of about sixty, carrying a brown-paper parcel. His face was familiar to me; but I could not place him. He caught her eye and nodded to her. She breathed a sharp sigh of relief and bent over and handed a letter she had in her hand to Willoughton's solicitor and pointed out the grey-bearded man to him. Then she went quietly to the witness box.

Hamley read the letter and at once bent over and handed it to Hazeldean and spoke to him. I caught a note of excitement in his hushed voice. Hazeldean read the letter and appeared to grow excited too. Hamley slipped out of his seat and went to the grey-bearded man who was still standing just inside the door of the Court and began to talk to him earnestly.

Greatorex began to examine Ruth; and naturally I turned my attention to her. His examination was directed also to show on what bad terms Kelstern and Willoughton had been. Ruth was called on to tell the jury some of Kelstern's actual threats. Then—it is astonishing how few things the police fail to ferret out in a really important case—the examination took a curious turn. Greatorex began to question Ruth about her own relations with Willoughton and the plain trend of his questions was to bring out the fact that they had not merely been engaged to be married but had also been lovers.

I saw at once what the prosecution was aiming at. It was trying to make use of the tendency of a British jury and a British judge, in a natural effort to champion morality, to hang a man or a woman, who is on trial for murder, for behaving immorally in relations with the other sex. There was no better way of prejudicing Willoughton than by proving that he had seduced Ruth under the promise of marriage.

Of course Hazeldean was on his feet at once protesting that this evidence was irrelevant and inadmissible; and of course Garbould was against him—he does not enjoy the nickname by which he is known to the junior bar for nothing. Hazeldean was magnificent. He had one of the worst rows with Garbould he had ever had; and he has had many. Garbould is a fool to let him have these rows. Hazeldean always gets the better of him, or seems to; and it does him good with the jury. But then Garbould was raised to the bench not for intelligence but for political merit. He ruled that the questions were admissible and put one or two to Ruth himself.

Then Willoughton lost his temper and protested that this had nothing to do with the case and that it was an outrage. Willoughton has a ringing voice of considerable volume. He is not at all an easy man to hush when he does not wish to hush; and they were sometime hushing him. By the time they succeeded Garbould was purplish-red with fury. Anything that he could do to hang Willoughton would certainly be done. But, observing the

jury, my impression was that Willoughton's outburst had done him good with it and that Hazeldean's protests had shaken its confidence in Garbould. When I looked at the faces, just a trifle sickly, of the counsel for the prosecution, I felt sure that the Crown had bungled this business rather badly.

Greatorex, assisted by Garbould, went on with his questions; and Ruth defiant rather than abashed, and looking in her flushed animation a more charming creature than ever, admitted that she and Willoughton had been lovers; that more than once when he had brought her home from a dance or a theatre he had not left her till the early morning. One of the maids had spied on them; and the Crown had the facts.

I was afraid, in spite of Hazeldean's protests, that the fact that Willoughton had seduced her under the promise of marriage, as Greatorex put it, would do him great harm with the jury—very likely it would hang him.

Then Ruth, still flushed, but not greatly discomposed, said: "That would be a reason for my father's murdering Mr. Willoughton, not for Mr. Willoughton's murdering my father."

That brought Garbould down upon her like a ton of bricks. She was there to answer questions, not to make idle remarks and so forth and so on.

Then Greatorex came to the breaking off of the engagement and put it to her that Willoughton had broken it off, had in fact jilted her after compromising her. That she would not have for a moment. She declared that they had had a quarrel and she had broken it off. To that she stuck and there was no shaking her, though Garbould himself took a hearty hand in trying to shake her.

In the middle of it Willoughton, who was looking quite himself again, now that the atmosphere of the Court might be said to be charged almost with violence, said in a very unpleasant, jeering voice: "What she says is perfectly true—what's the good of bothering her?"

Again Garbould was to the fore, and angrily reprimanded him for speaking, bade him keep silent, and said

that he would not have his Court turned into a bear-garden.

"With the bear on the bench," said Hazeldean to Arbuthnot in a whisper that carried well.

Two or three people laughed. One of them was a juryman. By the time Garbould had finished with him I did not think that that juryman would have convicted Willoughton, if he had actually seen him stab Kelstern.

Willoughton was writing a note which was passed to Hazeldean.

Hazeldean rose to cross-examine Ruth with a wholly confident air. He drew from her the facts that her father had been on excellent terms with Willoughton until the breaking off of the engagement; that in that matter he had taken her part warmly; and that when the maid who had spied upon them had informed him of her relations with Willoughton he had been very little more enraged than he was already.

Then Hazeldean asked: "Is it a fact that since the breaking off of your engagement the prisoner has more than once begged you to forgive him and renew it?"

"Four times," said Ruth.

"And you refused?"

"Yes," said Ruth. She looked at Willoughton queerly and added: "He wanted a lesson."

"Did he then beg you at least to go through the form of marriage with him, and promise to leave you at the church door?"

"Yes."

"And you refused?"

"Yes," said Ruth.

Garbould bent forward and said in his most unpleasant tone: "And why did you reject the opportunity of repairing your shameful behaviour?"

"It wasn't shameful," Ruth almost snapped; and she scowled at him frankly. Then she added naïvely: "I refused because there was no hurry. He would always marry me if I changed my mind and wanted to."

There was a pause. To me it seemed clearer than ever

that the Crown had bungled badly in raising the question of the relations between her and Willoughton since he had evidently been more than ready to save her from any harm that might come of their indiscretion. But then, with a jury, you can never tell. Then Hazeldean started on a fresh line.

In sympathetic accents he asked: "Is it a fact that your father was suffering from cancer in a painful form?"

"It was beginning to grow very painful," said Ruth sadly.

"Did he make a will and put all his affairs in order a few days before he died?"

"Three days," said Ruth.

"Did he ever express an intention of committing suicide?"

"He said that he would stick it out for a little while and then end it all," said Ruth. She paused and added: *"And that is what he did do."*

One might almost say that the Court started. I think that everyone in it moved a little, so that there was a kind of rustling murmur. Garbould threw himself back in his seat with a snort of incredulity and glowered at Ruth.

"Will you tell the Court your reasons for that statement?" said Hazeldean.

Ruth seemed to pull herself together; the flush had faded from her face and she was looking very tired; then she began in a quiet, even voice: "I never believed for a moment that Mr. Willoughton murdered my father. If my father had murdered Mr. Willoughton it would have been a different matter."

Garbould leaned forward and snarled that it was not her beliefs or fancies that were wanted, but facts.

I did not think that she heard him; she was concentrating on giving her reasons exactly; she went on in the same quiet tone: "Of course, like everybody else I puzzled over the weapon: what it was and where it had got to. I did not believe that it was a pointed piece of a half-inch steel rod. If anybody had come to the Turkish bath meaning to murder my father and hide the weapon, they

wouldn't have used one so big and so difficult to hide, when a hat-pin would have done just as well and could be hidden much more easily. But what puzzled me most was the tea-leaf in the wound. All the other tea-leaves that came out of the flask were lying on the floor. Inspector Brackett told me they were. And I couldn't believe that one tea-leaf had fallen on to my father at the very place above his heart at which the point of the weapon had penetrated the skin and got driven in by it. It was too much of a coincidence for me to swallow. But I got no nearer understanding it than anyone else."

Garbould broke in in a tone of some exasperation and told her to come to the facts. Hazeldean rose and protested that the witness should not be interrupted; that she had solved a mystery which had puzzled some of the best brains in England, and she should be allowed to tell her story in her own way.

Again Ruth did not appear to listen to them, and when they stopped she went on in the same quiet voice: "Of course I remembered that Dad had talked to putting an end to it; but no one with a wound like that could get up and hide the weapon. Then, the night before last I dreamt that I went into the laboratory and saw a piece of steel rod, pointed, lying on the table at which my father used to work."

"Dreams now!" murmured Garbould contemptuously; and he leaned back and folded his hands over his stomach.

"I didn't think much of the dream, of course," Ruth went on. "I had been puzzling about it all so hard for so long that it was only natural to dream about it. But after breakfast I had a sudden feeling that the secret was in the laboratory if I could only find it. I did not attach any importance to the feeling; but it went on growing stronger; and after lunch I went to the laboratory and began to hunt.

"I looked through all the drawers and could find nothing. Then I went round the room looking at everything and into everything, instruments and retorts and tubes and so on. Then I went into the middle of the floor and looked

slowly round the room pretty hard. Against the wall, near the door, lying ready to be taken away, was a gas cylinder. I rolled it over to see what gas had been in it and found no label on it."

She paused to look round the Court as if claiming its best attention; then she went on: "Now that was very queer because every gas cylinder must have a label on it —so many gases are dangerous. I turned on the cylinder and nothing came out of it. It was quite empty. Then I went to the book in which all the things which come in are entered, and found that ten days before Dad died he had had in a cylinder of $CO_2$ and seven pounds of ice. Also he had had seven pounds of ice every day till the day of his death. It was the ice and the $CO_2$ together that gave me the idea. $CO_2$, carbon dioxide, has a very low freezing-point—eighty degrees centigrade—and as it comes out of the cylinder and mixes with the air it turns into very fine snow; and that snow, if you compress it, makes the hardest and toughest ice possible. It flashed on me that Dad could have collected this snow and forced it into a mould and made a weapon that would not only inflict that wound but would *disappear instantly!*"

She paused again to look round the Court at about as rapt a lot of faces as any narrator could desire. Then she went on: "I knew that that was what he had done. I knew it for certain. Carbon dioxide ice would make a hard, tough dagger, and it would melt quickly in the hottest room of a Turkish bath and leave no smell because it is scentless. So there wouldn't be any weapon. And it explained the tea-leaf too. Dad had made a carbon dioxide dagger perhaps a week before he used it, perhaps only a day. And he had put it into the thermos flask as soon as he had made it. The thermos flask keeps out the heat as well as the cold, you know. But to make sure that it couldn't melt at all he kept the flask in ice till he was ready to use the dagger. It's the only way you can explain that tea-leaf. It came out of the flask sticking to the point of the dagger and was driven into the wound!"

She paused again and one might almost say that the Court heaved a deep sigh of relief.

Then Garbould asked in an unpleasant and incredulous voice: "Why didn't you take this fantastic theory straight to the police?"

"But that wouldn't have been any good," she protested quickly. "It was no use my knowing it myself; I had to make other people believe it; I had to find evidence. I began to hunt for it. I felt in my bones that there was some. What I wanted was the mould. I found it!"

She uttered the words in a tone of triumph and smiled at Willoughton; then she went on: "At least I found bits of it. In the box into which we used to throw odds and ends, scraps of material, damaged instruments, and broken test tubes, I found some pieces of vulcanite; and I saw at once that they were bits of a vulcanite container. I took some wax and rolled it into a rod about the right size and then I pieced the container together on the outside of it—at least most of it—there are some small pieces missing. It took me nearly all night. But I found the most important bit—*the pointed end!*"

She dipped her hand into her handbag and drew out a black object about nine inches long and three quarters of an inch thick and held it up for every one to see.

Someone, without thinking, began to clap; and there came a storm of applause that drowned the voice of the Clerk calling for order and the bellowing of Garbould.

When the applause died down, Hazeldean, who never misses the right moment, said: " I have no more questions to ask the witness, my lord," and sat down.

That action seemed to clinch it in my eyes, and I have no doubt, it clinched it in the eyes of the jury.

The purple Garbould leant forward and almost bellowed at Ruth: "Do you expect the jury to believe that a well-known man like your father died in the act of deliberately setting a dastardly trap to hang the prisoner?"

Ruth looked at him, shrugged her shoulders, and said with a calm acceptance of the facts of human nature one would expect to find only in a much older woman: "Oh,

well, Daddy was like that. And he certainly believed he had very good reasons for killing Mr. Willoughton."

There was that in her tone and manner which made it absolutely certain that Kelstern was not only like that but that he had acted according to his nature.

Greatorex did not re-examine Ruth; he conferred with Hazeldean. Then Hazeldean rose to open the case for the defence. He said that he would not waste the time of the Court, and that in view of the fact that Miss Kelstern had solved the problem of her father's death, he would only call one witness, Professor Mozley.

The grey-headed, grey-bearded, stooping man, who had come to the Court so late, went into the witness-box. Of course his face had been familiar to me; I had seen his portrait in the newspapers a dozen times. He still carried the brown-paper parcel.

In answer to Hazeldean's questions he stated that it was possible, not even difficult, to make a weapon of carbon dioxide hard enough and tough enough and sharp enough to inflict such a wound as that which had caused Kelstern's death. The method of making it was to fold a piece of chamois leather into a bag, hold that bag with the left hand, protected by a glove, over the nozzle of a cylinder containing liquid carbon dioxide, and open the valve with the right hand. Carbon dioxide evaporates so quickly that its freezing-point, 80° centigrade, is soon reached; and it solidifies in the chamois-leather bag as a deposit of carbon dioxide snow. Then turn off the gas, spoon that snow into a vulcanite container of the required thickness, and ram it down with a vulcanite plunger into a rod of the required hardness. He added that it was advisable to pack the container in ice while filling it and ramming down the snow, then put the rod into a thermos flask; and keep it till it is needed.

"And you have made such a rod?" said Hazeldean.

"Yes," said the Professor, cutting the string of the brown-paper parcel. "When Miss Kelstern hauled me out of bed at half-past seven this morning to tell me her discoveries, I perceived at once that she had found the solu-

tion of the problem of her father's death, which had puzzled me considerably. I had breakfast quickly and got to work to make such a weapon myself for the satisfaction of the Court. Here it is."

He drew a thermos flask from the brown paper, unscrew the top of it, and inverted it. There dropped into his gloved hand a white rod about eight inches long. He held it out for the jury to see.

"This carbon dioxide ice is the hardest and toughest ice we know of; and I have no doubt that Mr. Kelstern killed himself with a similar rod. The difference between the rod he used and this is that his rod was pointed. I had no pointed vulcanite container; but the container that Miss Kelstern pieced together is pointed. Doubtless Mr. Kelstern had it specially made, probably by Messrs. Hawkins & Spender."

He dropped the rod back into the thermos flask and screwed on the top.

Hazeldean sat down. The juryman who had been reprimanded by Garbould leaned forward and spoke earnestly to the foreman. Greatroxe rose.

"With regard to the point of the rod, Professor Mozley: would it remain sharp long enough to pierce the skin in that heat?" he asked.

"In my opinion it would," said the Professor. "I have been considering that point and bearing in mind the facts that Mr. Kelstern would from his avocation be very deft with his hands, and being a scientific man, would know exactly what to do, he would have the rod out of the flask and the point in position in very little more than a second—perhaps less. He would, I think, hold it in his left hand and drive it home by striking the butt of it hard with his right. The whole thing would not take him two seconds. Besides, if the point of the weapon had melted the tea-leaf would have fallen off it."

"Thank you," said Greatorex, and turned and conferred with the Crown solicitors.

Then he said: "We do not propose to proceed with the case, my lord."

The foreman of the jury rose quickly and said: "And the Jury doesn't want to hear anything more, my lord. We're quite satisfied that the prisoner isn't guilty."

Garbould hesitated. For two pins he would have directed the case to proceed. Then his eye fell on Hazeldean, who was watching him; I fancied that he decided not to give him a chance of saying more disagreeable things.

Looking black enough, he put the question formally to the Jury, who returned a verdict of "Not Guilty," and then he discharged Willoughton.

I came out of the Court with Ruth, and we waited for Willoughton.

Presently he came out of the door and stopped and shook himself. Then he saw Ruth and came to her. They did not greet one another. She just slipped her hand through his arm; and they walked out of the New Bailey together.

We made a good deal of noise, cheering them.

# HARRY STEPHEN KEELER

## THE SERVICES OF AN EXPERT

It was close upon midnight.

I had just placed my silk hat on the rack that hung at the side of the room when I heard the slight sounds coming from the direction of the fire escape. Then I detected the shadow on the window pane.

I paused in the act of removing my gloves and felt quickly for my back pocket. My revolver was there.

So I stood very quietly in the darkness and watched the man on the iron framework outside as he fumbled a moment and then raised the window. Since a small patch of moonlight, now outlined on the rug, acted as a weak source of illumination, I drew further back in the shadow of the door.

After thrusting one leg over the sill, the intruder drew in the rest of his body. For an instant he stood, glancing with uncertainty at the raised window back of him.

Then it was that I slid my right hand carefully along the wall until my fingers came in contact with the electric light switch. With my left I drew out the small, nickel-plated revolver that I have always with me for cases of emergency.

"Hands up!" I said calmly—and snapped on the incandescents.

He thrust his hands instantly above his head and stood blinking in the sudden flood of light. I had opportunity then, for the first time, to survey him from head to foot.

He was a small and rather stockily-built individual, clad in a checkered suit; his face could be aptly described by the phrase "roly-poly." On his head reposed a derby hat and, dropping from his collar, was a gorgeously red tie

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that lent the final touch to his general appearance of flashiness.

"Well," I remarked, advancing toward him with weapon still extended, "what's your game, my man?"

He seemed to be yet dazed by the sudden turn of affairs for him. After a pause, he spoke.

"My game? Well—to tell you the truth—I don't just know. A minute ago I was sliding in that window back of me . . . and now . . . I seem to be . . . well . . . just waiting . . . for something to happen."

"Don't worry," I answered grimly, "It'll happen." I stepped toward the 'phone that stood on the table, watching him all the while. He didn't blink an eye. So I stopped.

"I suppose you're one of these fly-by-night birds known as second-story men, eh?" My voice took on a more sarcastic tone. "Or perhaps you're only walking in your sleep now. In a short while you'll wake up and declare it's some terrible mistake. Or possibly you've stumbled into the wrong house by error?"

His upraised arms were losing their rigidity. To satisfy myself as to whether he was armed, I stepped over to him and inserted my hand into each one of his pockets in turn. He had no weapons, however.

"All right," I said. "Let 'em down." I went over to the window, closed it, and drew down the shade. Then I returned to the table and dropped into the swivel chair, beckoning him at the same time into the straight-backed chair that stood directly across. "Sit down," I commanded. "Before I turn you over to the police I'll have a little talk with you. Do you know where you are? Do you know whose apartment you're in?"

"Well," he replied, "the name on the doorbell downstairs says Mr. Peter J. Dawson."

Probably I was goading him with my remarks far more than was necessary as I answered:

"You're quite observing, I'm sure, I presume then, that since the doings of successful private criminal investigators and their families are of such interest to our news

papers, you were merely one of many who happened to read in the Chicago Despatch that Mrs. Dawson left yesterday for Atlantic City, and that her illustrious husband, solver of the famous Wrangley counterfeiting case, the Abe Shaffner bond theft, the Cissy Rogers murder, and other bizarre little puzzles forming part of our social fabric, was to leave the city this morning to direct the work on the Clyley kidnapping case at Cincinnati. Put a little too much faith in newspaper data this time, though, didn't you? How could you be certain, for instance, that Millionaire Clyley didn't alter his plans the last moment about whom he'd employ to help him find his missing daughter? What could you know of telegrams that might have passed since that news story was published?" I paused. "Such nice plans as you have, too. Of course you made sure, by telephoning first, that the servant was away too—Heaven knows where?"

He bit out his reply in short, angry words. "Say! If you're going to turn me over, hurry up and do it. I'm not going to sit here and listen to all your gaff."

"Here, here," I said, "don't get huffy, my good sir. Even though I represent a phase of society that's not at all liked by your ilk, I can still be a very good fellow—a very good fellow at times—in fact, this is the one time of your life that you want to cultivate my friendship, of all persons." I watched him narrowly. Then I continued quizzing him.

"Confess, though, now . . . you just strolled in, as it were, to see whether any of the famous Dawson diamonds, achieved as rewards for an honorable career of hunting thieves much bigger than yourself, were lying around loose? They were most accurately described, I believe, in the newspaper account of the big dinner party last week, weren't they? How about it?"

His answer was non-committal, to say the least.

"I'm not confessing anything of the sort. Ring up the cops and be done with it." He laughed an odd little laugh. "All the good cells 'll be filled up with drunks in another hour. It's midnight now."

The more I thought of our unusual situation the more I felt that this man could possibly prove very valuable to me. My questioning now took on a definite trend.

"What's your particular specialty, if I may make so bold as to inquire? My experience, I'll confess, has been with a higher order of criminals than yourself. It seems really a rare treat to talk with a real second-story man; or are you perhaps a porch climber? or a lock-picker? or a stick-up man? or maybe even a safe-blower?

"For example," I went on, "assuming that the jewelry you're looking for is over there in that iron box," and I pointed toward the massive safe that stood in the corner of the room, "just what, may I ask, was your method of procedure to be?"

"For the last time," he said wearily, "I'm telling you I'm not talking."

I was quite determined, though, to continue along the line on which I had already started.

"Ah, yes!" I remarked soothingly, "but you must talk. I feel a rather charitable impulse running through my veins this evening—an impulse that prompts me to be a trifle lenient with you. What do you know about safes?"

For the first time he betrayed a little interest.

"Oh, I know a little about 'em," he replied. "For instance—that one—over there—" He motioned toward the corner of the room. "I could tell you a few things about it—just from where I sit. That's one of the earlier ones put out by the International Burglar-proof Safe and Lock Company of Utica, New York. That's their type—" He wrinkled his brow and pondered a moment. ". . . 36 B."

Things were shaping up better than I had expected. My voice must have shown the satisfaction I felt. "Good. You are quite an educated fellow in your line. Now that safe belongs to my wife. Not a soul knows the combination of it but herself. I frankly confess I don't. Is a safe like that really burglar-proof? Could you open it, all alone, unaided?"

He crossed his legs. "I daresay I could," he returned, gazing at me through eyes that had become mere slits.

"For you see it happens to be all in the way you spin your dial around and listen for the tumblers dropping into place." He inserted his thumbs jauntily in his armholes and commenced to whistle a gay little tune. "But I don't intend to try," he added.

Obviously, this was the man I required. I dropped my tone of banter and spoke seriously.

"Now—as a sporting proposition—and because I've never seen such a person as yourself actually work in front of my eyes—if you could demonstrate your ability by opening yon strongbox in—say—five minutes—not a second more, you understand—I'd be careless enough to shut my eyes and let you walk out of here through the same fire escape window you came in."

Exultantly, he rose to his feet. "Say—are you dead in earnest? Are you on the square about that proposition? D'you mean it? Will you let me walk out o' here if I can jiggle that combination open?"

"Certainly," I assured him. "Of course I mean it. Can you do it?"

"I can make a try of it," he said, walking toward the safe. Then he glanced over it.

The silence was suddenly broken by the sharp ringing of the telephone bell which stood on the library table at the side of the room.

I ignored it.

Then it rang a second time.

The little man returned to the table and stood waiting, with his hands in his pockets.

"Going t' answer?" he inquired.

"Let it ring," I replied curtly.

He watched me closely, his face breaking slowly into a grin. Then he levelled his forefinger directly at me and launched forth into a scathing speech.

"Huh!" he exclaimed. "I'm a little next to you now. You're afraid to answer that phone. May I ask just why you don't want anybody t' know you were home in your apartment t'night—on the night of June the twenty-fifth—while the lady o' th' house is in the East—while you're

supposed to be on a train going to a big case in Cincinnati? Eh? What's coming off here t'night? What's your game—Mr.—Mr.—Dawson?" At this point he evidently ran out of either breath or denunciatory ideas.

That cursed phone then rang for the third time. I was not only quite flustered now—but angry as well. "That's enough from you," I growled.

His accusing forefinger was still pointed at me as the phone bell rang for the fourth—and what proved to be—the last time. He must have taken great delight in making me squirm, for he started off again.

"You've got something shady scheduled here for t'night. I always knew the police were as crooked as the crooks. You don't *dare* answer that phone. When you get ready t' let me into your little game, then maybe I'll do your dirty work. Not until." He sank into the straight-backed chair and stared at the window in back of me.

I glanced cautiously behind me, realizing that this rascal was perhaps playing for time. A suspicion crossed my mind that possibly a confederate was posted near the grounds. But we were quite alone. For about a minute I thought on the matter. This man had arrived at a crucial moment for me. Without doubt, it seemed best that I render a detailed explanation to him if I wished to placate him—especially in view of the fact that the telephone had complicated matters as it had. So I leaned back in my chair and began, picking my words with care.

"I'm going to let you in on a family secret now. Of course, I'm quite safe—and, likewise, I don't have to do it. If I wish, I can turn you over any minute and the little tale you might tell I could brand as a lie, pure and simple. But in some respects you're a valuable man to me tonight. You can do me a big service. In return, I do you the bigger service—of saving you from five or ten years in the Joliet Penitentiary.

"Now pay attention," I commanded. "I'm looking for something in my wife's safe. No, not specifically her diamonds—except in a certain sense. It's a packet of letters—

a packet that means more to me than the diamonds themselves. And I've got to get that packet.

"No doubt," I went on, "you've often read in the newspapers of some of the rich rewards I've received in the bigger cases I've worked successfully on. And I've been like a gambler, for when rewards were big, I've salted most of 'em away in diamonds. I made one fatal mistake, though: I gave all of mine, as fast as I accumulated them, to my wife. It's all she cares for—all she could ever see."

He was paying strict attention to my words; so I continued, punctuating my remarks with emphatic gestures of my clenched fists.

"That is, my friend, it's all she could ever see till—till these last few months—till she met this parlor lizard that she's fallen for. Oh yes, she's had an affair. She's received letters, and she's written them too; and the ones that she's written which have come back to her because of his being eternally on the move, she's faithfully put away in that private safe of hers till she could give 'em into his own dear hands. Fool that she was, to think she could carry on an affair under the very nose of a criminal investigator." I paused. "Well, to chop the story short, she's got my fortune—a hundred thousand dollars' worth in rings and geegaws—all hoarded up in that safe of hers like a miser. Sticking tighter to 'em than a barnacle sticks to the bottom of a mud scow.

"And I—well, I'm just a sucker—the benighted husband. Minus his fortune, minus the evidence to get a divorce with—for she's got to give me my freedom. I can stand most anything but this—being made a laughing-stock of. I've still a chance to make a happy play for life with some good, right sort of girl.

"She—my wife—left this morning for a trip to Atlantic City. That part of the statement in the Chicago Despatch was quite true. She doesn't dream that I even suspect. The servant went to visit a sick sister. And I—well, I'm on a train bound for Cincinnati to go to work on the Clyley kidnapping case . . . not! . . . are you wise now?

Millionaire Clyley—my old friend—is simply helping me out a bit, that's all.

"Instead, I'm back here in the apartment tonight, reconnoitering—looking over the land—figuring out whether I could procure tools from some of the joints I know in the underworld, come back tomorrow night, and drill, saw, hack, punch or chisel my way into that strong-box and get that evidence that will give me my freedom—and those diamonds that belong to me—not to her. Oh, I'll take care of her all right. I'll be fair with her. I'll give her some sort of alimony. But I've got to protect myself." I paused. "That's the situation, my friend. And along comes yourself—an expert in your line. Do you see now what I need you for? Can you help me out? If you can, you're a free man." I leaned back and mopped my forehead. I had talked for five straight minutes.

If I had expected sympathy, however, I failed woefully in my expectations. He was coldly calculating—nothing more.

"You got some jane on the string that you want to marry, haven't you?" he said caustically.

"No jane," I returned.

"I doubt it," he said. He paused thinking. "Now I'm talking business," he added. "What's there in all this for me?"

So far as I could see, there was no necessity for me to dicker with this fellow, since it was quite evident that I had the upper hand. So my reply was short and to the point.

"Not a red cent."

He seemed still inclined to argue. "Pretty hard bargain, I call it."

I was becoming impatient. The unpleasant thought of a possible confederate, in the hope of whose assistance he was delaying matters, again entered my mind. "To my way of thinking," I remarked, "it's a pretty easy bargain."

"Well," he returned, "what guarantee have I got that you'll let me go if I do the job—that is—if I can?"

Really, the man's stubbornness was aggravating. "Num-

skull," I said, restraining myself with difficulty from shouting at him, "—if I can get at that property, which all came from my own pockets in the first place, it's to my decided advantage that you, the mysterious burglar, get away. I'll account for my possession of the divorce evidence by saying I bought it outright from the man who brought it to me. As for you, it's to your undeniable benefit to keep a quiet tongue in your head afterward. Then, too, haven't you my promise—my word of honor?"

He did not lose the opportunity to deliver a thrust.

"A lot o' faith," he jeered, "I'd put in the word of honor of a guy that'd steal from his own wife, so's to marry some jane he's struck on. I don't believe that story about Mrs. Dawson and this parlor lizard. You're making that up. Say," he finished with a leer, "aren't you yourself the Gay Lothario in this case? And aren't you one of those things called Indian-Givers?"

This was going just a little too far, I decided. I was commencing to feel decidedly wrathful, so I determined to use up no more valuable time discussing the offer. "We're wasting precious moments," I said sharply. "What do you intend to do? Is it this—or the police?"

Evidently he realized that he was hardly in a position to do otherwise than comply with my wishes.

"I'll make the best of it," was his reply. "My copper friend—you're a mighty hard man to deal with—and if anything goes wrong—don't blame it on anybody but yourself." He paused. "Well—here's where I get down to work. I never use tools. Too crude."

He removed his coat.

I watched him with interest, wondering how on earth he could open a supposedly burglar-proof safe without an instrument of any kind. I had heard of his kind, but never so far as I could remember had I met up with an authentic case of a "tumbler-feeler." He seemed, however, quite self-confident.

He folded up his coat and deposited it on the chair which he had occupied. Then he unfastened each cuff and turned it back, clear to the elbow. He glanced at me.

"Say, friend," he queried, "if I can do it, don't I get one little jewel for myself—say a little half-carat ring?"

Seeing the preparations he had already gone to, I had not been inclined to yield jot nor tittle. His persistency, though, had exhausted my patience.

I plunged my hand into my pocket and brought forth the only bill that there was on my person—a crisp, yellow fifty—which I flung on the table without a word. He seized it cheerfully and tucked it in his vest-pocket.

After all—what did a mere $50 matter? The difference between his remuneration and mine was too great.

He walked slowly over to the safe and rapped on its sides and top with his knuckles. Then, with great mysteriousness, he wet the tips of his fingers, one at a time, on his tongue, and wiped them on his rolled up sleeves.

He stooped over.

Then he went through a series of puzzling actions. At times he spun the dial. At other times he worked it slowly, pressing his ear close to the iron door, and listening with a far-away look on his face. Occasionally he glanced in my direction out of the corner of his eye.

For nearly a minute I watched him. Then since it was summer time and the room had begun to feel stifling, I stepped casually over to the window, raised the shade, and opened it to its full extent, letting in a refreshing breeze from Lake Michigan.

This accomplished, I turned around to see how my expert was coming along with his task.

Great Cæsar's Horn Spoon!—

While my back was turned he had quietly succeeded in swinging open the door of the safe and had extracted therefrom a huge blue-steel revolver which, in less than a second, he had raised, pointed in my direction, and fired with a thundering report great enough to wake twenty neighborhoods.

I dropped flat to the floor and lay still as a log.

Hurt? Not a bit of it! He probably missed me by a mile—but I was taking no chances of receiving another broadside from that villainous-looking weapon. While I lay

prone, never moving, he stood stock still for a quarter of a minute. Then, with four giant strides, he cleared half the room and landed in the swivel chair with his back to me.

Cautiously, I raised my head. Silently, I regained my knees and feet. I tiptoed backward a step to the window and out on the fire escape, where I crouched down, watching the little man in the swivel chair.

Excitedly, he was jerking the receiver hook of the phone up and down. Finally he must have roused Central, for I heard him say: "H'llo—h'llo—'lo—North Shore Police Station, please——"

After the lapse of a few second he must have obtained his connection for he shouted into the transmitter:

"Station? Police station? North Shore? All right. Shoot an ambulance or a doctor and a squad in a red-hot hurry to 725 Franklin Road—the second apartment—the Dawson's apartment. I've wounded 'r killed a man. Killed him, I guess. Nope, don't know him—was on my way to Cincinnati and saw the headlines in the late papers announcing the Clyley girl had been found—so came back on home—had lost my latchkey—came up by firescape—found him here—yes! yes! yes!—oh hello, Cap, sure—this is Dawson himself speaking—sure—yes, Peter J. Dawson——"

I had heard enough. I slid silently down the iron fire-escape ladder and hastened forth into the night, my last two dimes jingling as I ran.

# MRS. BELLOC LOWNDES

## POPEAU INTERVENES

### I

"This is dear, delightful Paris! Paris, which I love; Paris, where I have always been so happy with Bob. It's foolish of me to feel depressed—I've nothing to be depressed about——"

Little Lady Waverton could hear her voiceless thoughts as she walked through the vast grey Gare du Nord on this hot, airless July night. She formed one of a party of three: the other two being her husband, Lord Waverton, and the beautiful Russian *émigrée,* Countess Filenska. The three friends had suddenly determined to take a little jaunt to Paris "on the cheap," without maids or valets. It had really been the Countess's idea. She had drawn a delightful picture of an old hostelry on the left bank of the Seine called the Hotel Paragon.

Perhaps the journey had tired the charming, over-refined, delicate woman her friends called Gracie Waverton. Yet this morning she had felt as well and happy as she ever did feel, for she was not a strong woman, and for some time past she had felt that she and her Bob, whom in her quiet, reserved way she loved deeply, were drifting apart. Like all very rich men, Lord Waverton had a dozen ways of killing time in which his wife could play no part. Still, according to modern ideas they were a happy couple.

It did not take long for the autobus to glide across Paris at this time of night, and when they did turn into the quiet *cul de sac,* across the end of which was the superb eighteenth-century mansion which had been the

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town palace of the Dukes of Paragon, Lady Waverton lost her vague feeling of despondency. There was something so cheery, as well as truly welcoming, about mine host and his wife. She was enchanted, too, with the high-ceilinged, panelled rooms, which had been reserved for their party, and which overlooked a lovely garden.

## II

"Robert! It is *too* exquisite! You are the most generous man in the world!"

Olga Filenska was gazing at an open white velvet-lined jewel-case containing a superb emerald pendant.

"I'm glad you like it, darling——" Lord Waverton seized her hand and made her put what it contained on the table near which they both stood. Then he clasped her in his arms, and their lips met and clung together.

The secret lovers were standing in the centre of the large, barely-furnished *salon* which belonged to the private suite, and they felt secure from sudden surprise by the high screen which masked the door.

At last he released her, and then he moodily exclaimed: "Why did you make me bring my wife? It spoils everything, and makes me feel such a cad!"

"Remember my reputation. It is all I have left of my vanished treasures!"

He caught her to him again, and once more kissed her long and thirstily. "Oh, how I love you!" he said in a strangled whisper. "There's nothing, nothing, *nothing* I wouldn't do to have you for ever as my own!"

"Is that true?" she asked, with a searching look.

"Haven't I offered to give up everything, and make a bolt? It's you who refuse!"

"Your wife," she murmured, in a low, bitter tone, "would never divorce you. She thinks it wicked."

"If I'm willing to give up my country, and everything I care for, for love of you, why shouldn't you do as much for me?"

But to that she made no answer.

What would they both have felt had it suddenly been revealed to them that their every word had been overheard, each passionate gesture witnessed, by an invisible listener and watcher? Yet such was the strange and almost incredible fact. Hercules Popeau, but lately retired on a pension from the C.I.D. branch of the French Police, had long made the Hotel Paragon his home, and his comfortable study lay to the right of the stately drawing-room which terminated Lord and Lady Waverton's suite.

He had lived in the old house for quite a long time before he had discovered—with annoyance rather than satisfaction—that just behind the arm-chair in which he usually sat, and cleverly concealed in the wainscoting, was a slanting sliding panel which enabled him both to hear and to see everything that went on in the next room. This sinister "Judas," as it was well called, dated from the eighteenth century, when a diseased inquisitiveness was the outstanding peculiarity of both the great and the humble, even the King spending his leisure in reading copies of the love-letters, intercepted in the post, of those of his faithful subjects who were known to him.

Hercules Popeau had been closely connected with the British Army during the great war, and he remembered that Lord Waverton had performed an act of signal valour at Beaumont Hamel. That fact had so far interested him in the three tourists as to have caused him to watch the party while they were at dinner the evening following their arrival in Paris. Popeau was very human, and he had taken a liking to fragile-looking Lady Waverton, and a dislike to her lovely friend. The scene he had just witnessed confirmed his judgment of the Countess.

"I wish Gracie were not here!" exclaimed Lord Waverton.

"She is—how you call it?—too much thinking of herself to think of us," was the confident answer.

There came a look of discomfort and shame over his face. "You women are such damn good actresses! Then you think she's really ill this morning?"

"Ill is a big word. Still she is willing to see a doctor.

It is fortunate that I know a very good Paris physician. He will be here very soon. But she wants us to start for Versailles now, even before he comes."

"All right, I'll go and get ready."

When she believed herself alone, Countess Filenska walked across to the long mirror between the two windows and stood looking at herself there, in the bright light, dispassionately.

Hercules Popeau gazed at her, absorbed. What a beautiful woman! While very dark, she had no touch of swarthiness. Her oval face, indeed, had the luminosity of a white petal. She had had the courage to remain unshingled, and the Frenchman, faithful to far-away memories of youth, visioned the glorious mantle her tightly-coiled hair must form when unbound. Her figure, at once slender and rounded, was completely revealed, as is the fashion to-day, by her plain black dress. A Russian? Hercules Popeau shook his head. Her southern type of beauty was unmistakable. He had known an Athenian woman very like this Countess Filenska.

It had been the hidden watcher's lifelong business to guess the innermost thoughts of men and women. But he felt he had no clue as to what was making this beautiful "dark lady" smile in so inscrutable a way to herself.

At last she turned round and left the room, and at once her unseen admirer, and, yes, judge, closed the tiny slit in the panelled wall. What a curious, romantic, and, yes, sinister page he had just turned in the great Book of Life! A page of a not uncommon story; that of a beautiful, unscrupulous woman playing the part of serpent in a modern Garden of Eden.

It was clear that Lord Waverton was infatuated with this lovely creature, but there had been no touch of genuine passion in her voice, or even in her apparently eager response to his ardour.

Hercules Popeau had a copy of the latest "Who's Who?" on his writing-table. Eagerly he opened the section containing the letter W. Yes, here was the entry:

"Waverton, Robert Hinchfield, of Liddersfield, York. Second Baron."

And then there came back to him the knowledge that this man's father had been one of the greatest of Victorian millionaires. No wonder he had been able to present the woman he loved in secret with that magnificent jewel!

There came the sounds of a motor drawing up under the huge *porte-cochère*. Rising, the Frenchman went quickly over to the open window on his right.

Yes, there was a big car, the best money could hire, with his lordship standing by the bonnet. He looked the ideal Milord of French fancy, being a tall, broad man with fair hair, having in it a touch of red. He was obviously impatient and ill at ease. But he had not long to wait. The Countess stepped out into the courtyard. Even in her close motor bonnet she looked entrancingly lovely.

Popeau took a step backward as there floated up the voices of the two people whose secret he now shared.

"Did you see Gracie?" asked Lord Waverton, abruptly.

"Yes, and she was so sweet and kind! She begs us not to hurry back. She is quite looking forward to the visit of my old friend, Dr. Scorpion."

*Scorpion?* A curious name—not a happy name—for a medical man. Hercules Popeau had once known a doctor of the name.

As the motor rolled out on to the boulevard, he went back to his desk, and taking up the speaking tube, he whistled down it. "Madame Colbec? I have something important to say to you!"

He heard the quick answer, "At your service always, Monsieur."

"A doctor is coming to see Lady Waverton this morning. *Before* he sees Miladi, show him yourself into my bedroom."

There came a surprised: "Do you feel ill, Monsieur?"

"I am not very well; and I have reason to think this doctor is an old friend of mine. But I do not wish Dr. Scorpion to know that he is not being shown straight into

the bedroom of his English lady patient. Have I made myself clear?"

He heard her quick word of assent. Madame Colbec was as sharp as a needle, and she had once had reason to be profoundly grateful to Hercules Popeau. He could trust her absolutely; sometimes he called her, by way of a joke, "Madame Discretion."

Hercules Popeau always did everything in what he called to himself an artistic—an Englishman would have said a thorough—way. Thus, before getting into his bed, he entirely undressed and drew together the curtains of his bedroom windows. Thus anyone coming into the room from the sunny corridor outside would feel in darkness, while to one whose eyes were already accustomed to the dim light, everything would be perfectly clear.

He had already been in bed half an hour, when at last the door opened, and he heard Madame Colbec say in a smooth tone, "Entrez, Monsieur le Docteur." His heart gave a leap, for the slight individual who had just been shown into the darkened room was undoubtedly his Scorpion—the man he had known twenty years ago. The doctor had been about thirty when he had got into the very serious trouble which had brought him into touch with the then Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, so he must now be fifty.

With a sardonic look on his powerful face Hercules Popeau watched his visitor grope forward a little uncertainly.

"Miladi," he said at last, in an ill-assured tone, "I will ask your permission to draw the curtains a little? Otherwise I cannot see you!"

He put his hat on a chair as he spoke, and then he went towards the nearest window, and pulled apart the curtains, letting in a stream of light; he turned towards the bed—

"It is a long time since we have met, my good doctor."

For a moment Popeau thought that the man who stood stock-still staring at him, as if petrified, was about to fall down in a faint. And a feeling of regret, almost of shame,

came over him, for he was a kindly man, at having played the other such a trick.

But the visitor made a great effort to regain his composure, and at last, with a certain show of valour, he exclaimed: "I have been shown into the wrong room. I am here to see a lady who is ill."

"That is so," said Popeau quietly. "But I, too, feel ill, and hearing that you had been called to this hotel, I thought I would see you first, to ask your advice. I confess I wondered if you were the Dr. Scorpion I had once known?"

To the unfortunate man who stood in the middle of the large room there was a terrible edge of irony in the voice that uttered those quiet words.

"Of course, I know that in the old days you were more accustomed to diagnose the state of an ailing woman than that of a man," went on the ex-police chief pitilessly.

And then he changed his tone. "Come, come!" he exclaimed. "I have no right to go back to the past! Draw a chair close up to my bed, and tell me how you have got on all these years?"

With obvious reluctance the doctor complied with this almost command. "I have now been in very respectable practice for some time." He waited a moment, then he added bitterly. "Can you wonder that seeing you gave me a moment of great discomfort, reminding me of certain errors of my youth for which I have bitterly repented?"

"I am glad to hear you have repented," said Popeau quietly.

In a clearer, calmer tone Scorpion went on, "I made a good marriage; I have a sweet wife and two excellent children."

"Good! Good!"

Hercules Popeau held out his hand. The other took it. And then the detective felt a sensation of violent recoil, for it was as if the hand he held was a dead hand. It was icy cold—an infallible sign of shock. The ex-police chief felt a touch of sharp remorse. He had nothing in him of

the feline human being who likes to play with a man or a woman as a big cat plays with a mouse.

## III

Lord and Lady Waverton and their friend had arrived on a Sunday night, and Dr. Scorpion's first visit to the hotel had been paid on the Tuesday morning. As the week went on Lady Waverton, while still keeping to her room, became convalescent, though the doctor recommended that her ladyship should go on being careful till the day that she was to leave Paris, that is on the Saturday.

On the Friday morning Madame Colbec herself brought up Hercules Popeau's *petit déjeuner*. She looked anxious and worried. "Miladi is worse," she said abruptly. "I have already telephoned for the doctor. The countess is greatly distressed! I must hurry, as I have to serve an English breakfast for two in the next room at once."

A few minutes later Popeau, peeping through the slanting "Judas," sat watching Lord Waverton and the Countess Filenska. After having exchanged a long, passionate embrace, they had sat down, but the excellent omelette prepared by Madame Colbec remained untasted. It was almost as if they were quarrelling, for the first words uttered by the Englishman were:

"I don't see why you should go to England to-day——"

She said firmly, "It is imperative that I should see the man who is going to Russia on Saturday."

"Well, then, if you go——" he had the grace to look ashamed, "I don't see why I shouldn't go, too! Gracie hates to have me about her when she's ill. I can't help thinking that the sensible thing to do would be to get a trained nurse over from England."

The Countess looked violently disturbed. She was pouring some black coffee into her cup, and Popeau saw that the beautiful hand trembled.

"You cannot do better than leave Gracie in the French doctor's hands," she explained. "He is wonderful!"

There came a knock at the door, and Doctor Scorpion came in.

"I am, indeed, sorry," he began, "to hear that my patient is worse——" but the Countess cut him short. "Let us go to her!" she exclaimed, and together they left the room.

A few moments later the Countess came back.

"Gracie is better," she observed. "She will probably be able to go home next Tuesday or Wednesday."

She put her hand caressingly through Lord Waverton's arm. "I will go over to England to-day at four o'clock, and I will be back here by to-morrow night. What do you say of that for devotion?"

Her lover's face cleared. "Does that mean——"

"That I am a foolish woman? That I do not like being away from you even for quite a little while? Yes, it does!"

She submitted—the unseen watcher thought with a touch of impatience—to his ardent caresses. Suddenly the door behind the screen opened. The two sprang apart and, as the doctor edged his way in, Lord Waverton left the room.

Scorpion looked at the Countess fixedly. "Is it true that Madame la Comtesse is going away to England to-day?"

"I shall return to Paris to-morrow," she said evasively.

"I have thought matters over, and I refuse to go on with the treatment before payment, or part payment, is made," he said firmly.

"Come, don't be unreasonable!" she exclaimed.

He answered at once, in a fierce, surly tone, "I cannot risk my head unless it is made worth my while. Cannot you invent something which requires at once an advance from the Milord of, say——" he hesitated, then slowly uttered the words, "fifty thousand francs?"

Popeau expected to hear a cry of protest, but the beautiful woman who now stood close to the ugly, clever-looking little doctor opened her hand-bag and said coldly, "I have something here which is worth a great deal more than fifty thousand francs," and she handed him the jewel-case which contained the emerald pendant.

Scorpion opened the case. He looked at the gorgeous

stone with glistening, avid eyes. Slowly he shut the jewel-case and put it in his pocket.

"Then you will keep your promise?"

There was a long pause. The doctor produced a loose-leaved prescription block.

"I will fulfil my promise," he said firmly, "if you will write on this sheet of paper what I dictate." He handed her a fountain pen:

"My dear friend and doctor,—I beg you to accept the jewel I am sending you, a square-cut emerald, which is my own property to dispose of, in consideration of the great care and kindness you showed me when I was so extremely ill last year.—Your ever grateful, OLGA FILENSKA."

She hesitated for what seemed, both to the invisible watcher and to her accomplice, a long time. But at last she wrote out the words he had dictated.

Scorpion put the sheet of paper in the pocket where already reposed the jewel-case.

"*C'est entendu,*" he exclaimed, and turned towards the door.

A moment later Hercules Popeau telephoned to Madame Colbec: "Make some pretext to keep the doctor till I come down!"

He took out of a drawer a large sheet of notepaper headed *Prefecture de Police, Paris.* On it he wrote as follows:

"Madame,—You are in grave danger. The man you are employing to rid you of your rival is affiliated to the French Police. He has revealed your plot. An affidavit sworn to by him will reach Scotland Yard in the course of to-morrow. A copy of the sworn statement of Dr. Scorpion will also be laid before Lord Waverton, who will be summoned to appear as a witness at the extradition proceedings. An admirer of your beauty thinks it kind to warn you that you will be well advised to break

your journey to-day. The value of the jewel which I enclose is eight hundred pounds sterling."

He put the letter in his drawer, and then he ran downstairs.

Scorpion was chatting to Madame Colbec in her tiny office. He looked surprised and disturbed when he saw Hercules Popeau.

"How is your patient, my good Scorpion?"

"Going on fairly," said the other hesitatingly. "Though not well enough to leave the hotel to-morrow, as she hoped to do."

"I have a word to say to you." Popeau's voice had become cold and serious. "We will go upstairs to my rooms."

Scorpion stumbled up the staircase of the grand old house. He was too frightened to know what he was doing, or where he was going. When he reached the landing the other man took hold of his shoulder and pushed him through the door of his study. Then he locked the door, and turning, faced his abject visitor:

"The first thing I ask you to do is to put on the table the emerald which has just been given you as the price of blood."

"The emerald? What do you mean?" he faltered.

"You know well what I mean!"

A look of rage came over the livid face. "Does that woman dare to call me a thief?" he exclaimed. "See what she herself wrote when she gave me this jewel!" And with a shaking hand he drew a folded sheet of paper from his pocket.

"I want that, too."

Scorpion sank down on a chair, and the ex-police chief came and stood over him. "Listen carefully to what I am going to say, Scorpion."

The wretched man looked up, his eyes full of terror, while Popeau went on, tonelessly:

"Once more I am going to allow you to escape the fate which is your due. Last time it was for the sake of your

mother. This time it will be for the sake of two women—your good wife, and the unfortunate lady whom you, or perhaps I ought to say your temptress and accomplice, had doomed to a hideous death by poison."

Scorpion stared up at him without speaking; his face had gone the colour of chalk.

"This morning you dictated a letter to your accomplice, Scorpion, and I now dictate to you the following confession."

"I, Victor Scorpion, confess to having entered into a conspiracy with a woman I know under the name of the Countess Filenska, to bring about the death of Lady Waverton on——"

Popeau looked fixedly at Scorpion.

"What day was she to die?" he asked.

Scorpion stared at his tormentor. He did not, he felt he could not, answer.

At last he said in a whimpering voice, "I did not mean the poor Miladi to die."

"But what day did the Countess expect her to die?"

Popeau had to bend down to hear the words:

"Next Monday."

"Write down the proposal put to you."

"I was to receive five hundred pounds sterling on the day of her death, and within six months of the Countess's marriage to Lord Waverton ten thousand pounds sterling, whatever the rate of exchange might be at the time."—(Signed) Victor Alger Scorpion.

"Do allow me to put down that I did not intend to carry out this infamous plan?" he asked pleadingly.

Popeau hesitated. "No," he said, "I will not allow you to do that. But this I will promise. Within a few hours from now you yourself shall do what you wish with that piece of paper."

"And now," he went on, "you can make yourself at

home in these two rooms, and you will have the use of my bathroom beyond." He smiled genially. "You may also telephone home to your wife, saying you will not be home till late."

## IV

The woman whom some of her English friends called "the dark lady" had settled herself very comfortably in a first-class compartment of the Paris-Calais express. She was quite alone, for in July there are few travellers to England. So she was rather taken aback when a big man, dressed in a pale grey alpaca suit, suddenly thrust his body and head through the door leading into the corridor.

"Have I the honour of speaking to the Countess Filenska?" he said.

She hesitated a moment. Then she saw that he held in his hand a bulky envelope, and involuntarily she smiled. From dear, foolish Waverton, of course! A *billet doux,* accompanied, no doubt, by some delightful gift.

She held out her hand, "I am the Countess Filenska," she said pleasantly.

"I have been told to give you this, Madame. I am glad I have had the good fortune to arrive before the train started."

He lifted his hat and walked off.

The train started; slowly she broke the seal of the big envelope. Yes, there was a jewel case! Eagerly she opened it, and then came mingled disappointment and surprise, for it only contained the emerald which she had given that morning to Scorpion.

With a feeling of sudden apprehension she unfolded the piece of note paper which accompanied it. Slowly, with eyes dilated with terror, she read the terrible words written there.

Could she leap out of the train? No, it was moving too quickly. She could not afford to risk an accident. Feverishly she counted over her money. Yes, she had enough, amply enough, to break her journey at Calais, and go on

to——? After a moment's deep thought she uttered aloud the word "Berlin."

Late that same afternoon Madame Colbec opened the door of Hercules Popeau's study.

"Milord Waverton," she murmured in a nervous tone.

The Englishman walked in. He looked uncomfortable, even a little suspicious. He felt anxious. Was his wife worse, and was the man who had asked to see him a specialist?

"I have a painful, as well as a serious, communication to make to your lordship," began Hercules Popeau in slow, deliberate tones. "I belong to the French Criminal Investigation Department, and a most sinister fact has just been brought to our notice."

He looked fixedly—it was a long, searching glance—into the other man's bewildered face. And then he felt a thrill of genuine relief. Lord Waverton, so much was clear, was quite unconscious of the horrible plot which had had for object that of ridding him of his wife.

"The fact brought to our notice," went on Popeau quietly, "concerns Lady Waverton."

"My wife? Impossible!"

Lord Waverton drew himself up to his full height. He looked angry, as well as incredulous.

"Lady Waverton," went on the other, "possesses a terrible enemy."

"I assure you," said Lord Waverton coldly, "that the French police have made some absurd mistake. My wife is the best of women, kindness itself to all those with whom she comes in contact. *I* may have enemies; she has none."

"Lady Waverton has an enemy," said Popeau positively. "And what is more, that enemy intended to compass her death, and, indeed, nearly succeeded in doing so."

The Englishman stared at the Frenchman. He felt as if he was confronting a lunatic.

"This enemy of Lady Waverton's laid her plans—for it is a woman—very cleverly," said Popeau gravely. "She discovered in this city of Paris a man who will do anything

for money. That man is a doctor, and for what appeared to him a sufficient consideration he undertook to poison her ladyship."

He waited a moment, then added in an almost casual tone: "Lady Waverton's death was to have occurred next Monday."

"What!" exclaimed Lord Waverton, in a horror-stricken voice, "do you mean the little French doctor who has been attending my wife——"

"Yes," said Hercules Popeau stolidly. "Dr. Scorpion had undertaken to bring about what would have appeared to everybody here, in the Hotel Paragon, a natural death."

Lord Waverton covered his face with his hands.

"Most fortunately for you, my lord, this infamous fellow-countryman of mine grew suddenly afraid, and made a full confession of the hideous plot. He brought with him a written proof, as well *as a valuable emerald,* which was part of the price the would-be murderess was willing to pay the man she intended should be the actual murderer."

The speaker turned away, for he desired to spare the unhappy man, whose sudden quick, deep breathing showed the awful effect those last words had had on him.

The rest of the blood money—ten thousand pounds sterling—was to be paid when Scorpion's temptress became the second wife of a wealthy English peer."

Lord Waverton gave a strangled cry.

Popeau took out of his pocket the two documents, the deed of gift written out by the Countess and the confession signed by Scorpion himself.

"I will ask you to read these through," he said. And then, after Lord Waverton had read Scorpion's confession, he opened the door of the bedroom.

"Come here a moment," he called out, "I have done with that paper I asked you to sign, and I am ready to give it you back the moment you have informed this gentleman that you wrote it. Say in English, 'I, Scorpion, swear that all that I wrote down here is true, and that this is my signature.' "

The man repeated the words in a faltering voice.

Popeau handed him his confession. "Take this piece of paper," he observed, "down into the courtyard; there set a light to it, and watch it burn; then go home and thank the good God and your good wife that you have not begun the long road which leads to the Devil's Island."

After Scorpion had left the room, Hercules Popeau turned to the Englishman. "I trust," he said, "that your lordship will not think it impertinent if I ask you to listen to me for yet another two or three minutes."

Lord Waverton bent his head. His face had gone grey under its tan.

"I am old enough to be your father, and this would I say to you, and I trust that you will take it in good part. There was a time, not long ago, when a man in your position was guarded by high invisible barriers from any terrible dangers. Those barriers are no longer——"

There came a knock at the door. A telegram was handed to Lord Waverton. He tore open the envelope.

> "An unexpected chance has come my way of getting back to Russia and of recovering some of my lost property. Good-bye, dear friends. Thank you both for your goodness to an unhappy woman."

As Lord Waverton handed the two slips of paper to his new friend, Hercules Popeau looked much relieved.

"All you have to do," he exclaimed, "is to show Miladi this telegram, and then to give her—how do you say it in English?—a good kiss on her sweet face!"

# SIDNEY GOWING

## THE POACHER

"TIGHT places," said Commander Venables reflectively, "are of two kinds, pleasant and unpleasant. It's simply joss whether you get out or not. To be blackmailed for murder, particularly if one knows that one is guilty, belongs to the unpleasant class. And that's what happened to me in——"

"Stop!" said Edward Strachan, and held up three fingers to the silent steward who was crossing the room.

The three commanders sat in the warmest corner of the smoking-room at the Naval Barracks, Portsmouth. A soft rain beat upon the windows. Not for half an hour would they need to tramp through the wet dockyard to the Asia pontoon.

Commander Robert Venables, popularly "Bolo," was long and slim, with a clear mahogany complexion, whimsical eyes, and a masterful beak of a nose. Burdon-Lee was precisely his opposite type, light-coloured and dreamy, with a crop of freckles that powdered his face and overflowed into his hair. Strachan was small and agile, his expression alert and wary. All three were of the same term on Britannia, and had seen many windy terms since the old ship passed.

The steward placed three glasses on the table. Strachan lifted one of them and blinked at Commander Venables.

"A small tribute to the most ingenious liar in the Service," he murmured. "Go on, Bolo; we are listening."

Burdon-Lee shook his head at Strachan and smiled cryptically. Venables' brows knitted in protest.

"One may occasionally pull a leg, Ned," he said quietly,

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"but what I am about to tell you is the truth in all its amplitude."

Ned set down his empty glass and sighed.

"The secant of the Latitude plus the sine of the Declination equals the sine of the True Amplitude," he said. "Proceed."

"In 19—," said Bolo, "while a sweet little lootenant, I got my first command. After looking in at Gieve's to buy a larger size in caps, I hoisted my pennant and so forth on the fishery protection ship *Jaguar*. She'd just finished refitting at Chatham. My orders were to proceed north and relieve her sister ship *Ocelot,* on duty at Aberdeen.

"I might have known that was a bad omen to start with. The devil invented Chatham and its climate and surroundings, and one of his chief outlying dependencies is Aberdeen. But I didn't worry. As a two-ringer with a first command I was feeling about three sizes larger than Drake.

"I took the *Jaguar*—by the way, I'm dazzle-painting all the names in this show so as not to hurt people's feelings—into Tynemouth on my way, and there I met the *Ocelot*. She had orders to come south without waiting for me to relieve her. So, of course, her commanding officer came on board to hand over the glad news.

"And that," said Bolo, "is where I first tumbled that there was something dark and sinister lurking in those misty seas. The skipper of *Ocelot* was sort of pallid and jumpy and depressed—like a man who's just been a prisoner, or a medium, or a co-respondent or something. *You* know, Ned."

"Who was he?" asked Strachan.

"Jones. Lieutenant Jones."

"Good name," murmured Strachan.

"He left the service ages ago, having come into horrid opulence, and now he breeds Black Berkshires and takes medals for 'em. So there's no harm in mentioning him; he's a ship that's passed in the night. Well, old Jones sat in my wardroom looking like the ghost of himself and

throwing out dark warnings that I couldn't make head or tail of.

" 'Look here, old thing,' I said, 'I wish you'd say right out what you mean. What are you hinting at?'

" 'Oh, nothing!' said Jones.

" 'You aren't stuffy because they've sent me up north to do you out of this stunt?' said I. It was Jones's first command. 'Goodness knows I never wanted the job!'

" 'Good lord, no!' said Jones. 'I was never so glad to be shifted in my life. Don't make any mistake about that.' He lit up one of my cigars, and his fist was pretty shaky. 'I had a bit of a shock up there, and perhaps I haven't quite got over it.'

"I waited for him to open out. Jones was an old pal of mine, and one of the best. But there was nothing doing.

" 'All I can tell you,' he said, 'is to keep your weather eye lifting if you come across any of those Scandinavian fishermen, 'specially the Danes and Swedes.'

" 'Naturally. That was what I'm sent for.'

" 'They're an obstinate crowd,' said Jones. 'You steer clear of them, that's what I mean.'

" 'How on earth d'you suppose I'm going to do that?' said I. 'If I catch 'em poaching inside our three-mile limit I've got to run 'em in. That's what all the row's about.'

" 'I know,' said Jones. 'But if you have any trouble, or they refuse to heave to, don't fire over them—unless you're very sure of your gunner.'

" 'I never heard such bosh as you're talking!' said I. 'Why don't you tell me what you're driving at, if it's anything?'

" 'It isn't—much,' said Jones, getting red. 'I was a fool to have mentioned it at all. If you happen to come across a steam trawler called the *Sverige*—but never mind that. We've been pals long enough for me to give you a hint, and for the same reason, if you should chance to hear of any trouble connected with me while you're up there, I know you're not the chap to spread it about. I've had a

bit of a shake up, as I said, and I think I may cut the Service.'

" 'Skittles!' said I.

" 'I'm going home on three weeks' leave, and I shall think it over. Good-night, old son, and the best of luck to you,' said old Jones, and he pushed off forlornly. There was no getting anything more out of him."

I sailed on the next tide, wondering what had happened to Jones. It wasn't like him. He used to have a nerve like cold brass, and was generally a merry sort of pup. However, one takes things as they come, and I didn't worry.

I reported in the Forth, and eventually reached my beat, which was Invergordon to Cromarty. It took us a while to get there. The *Jaguar* was a holy terror. She was a converted trawler. They'd only kept her on because she was cheap to run; cheapness was the slogen just then. Her speed was about the same as a horse tramcar—she could barely do ten knots, and eight was nearer her average.

In fact she was the sort of craft that does get detailed to protect fisheries in peace time—apparently for the reason that a fairly fast iron-built trawler with a bad conscience is quite likely to outsteam her. However, a first command's a first command, and I wouldn't have swopped with the Number One of the flag-ship. We patrolled for six days in thick weather, and there was absolutely nothing doing. It was a bit lonely, of course.

"Who was your sub?" asked Strachan.

"Didn't have a sub. Second-in-command was a gunner—a glorious old bottle-nosed gunner, with a wary eye and a black torpedo-beard. One of the very best; his name was John Pym—same as the irreverent blighter who started Charles the Martyr on his road to the scaffold. Probably a descendant. You remember Green's history: 'Pym himself rose only to sit down choked with tears'? But *my* John never wept. The only tears shed on that cruise were my own.

"On the evenin' of the seventh day I was up on the bridge talkin' over the evolution with Mr. Pym. I told him the Danish trawlers were causing a lot of trouble fishing in British waters, but it seemed as if our Joss was out, as far as catching 'em went.

"Yes, sir," says Pym, "and the Aberdeen fishermen are pretty sick about it. There's some rich grounds here, and the Board of Fisheries has called a close time on them."

"The trouble is," I said, "that while the Scotch fishermen respect the closed waters, the foreigners don't. They run in and rake the protected grounds, and sweep off with big hauls—mainly at night. They find it worth while, even with the risk of losing their gear and having a fifty pound fine to pay."

"Our fishers catch it a lot hotter when the Danish gunboats nab 'em up Iceland way," said Pym, who was feeling a bit vindictive about it. And ten minutes later as we rounded Scaith Head, keepin' pretty close in, the signalman calls: "Trawler inshore, with her gear down, sir!"

Pym and I picked her up at the same moment, and we got the glasses on her.

"She's a Dutchman, sir!" said Pym; he belonged to the early vintage and called all Swedes, Danes and Huns, Dutchmen. The trawler was a big red iron Dane. Poacher? By gad, she was scooping up the bottom right through the thick of the reservation!

The Dane was nearly two miles away, and we closed him. I hoisted the International signal, "Stop instantly."

He took no more notice of my signal than if it had been the steward's shirt. He didn't even slip his trawl, but waited to yank it aboard—*that* was what galled me—and when he'd done it we'd gained a mile on him. Then he steered straight out to sea.

He had the legs of us. He made a good twelve knots, and there was the old *Jaguar* thumpin' and gruntin' after him, doin' about eleven—and that was a miracle. But my chief E.R.A. actually whacked her up till we were holding the Dane, and even gainin' a little. What it was like in

the engine-room I don't know. Hell must have been a holiday to it.

"It'll be dark in half an hour," growled old Pym in his beard, "and then we'll lose him."

I could see that for myself. And I gave the order "Starboard gun's crew, close up!" And I knew old Pym wondered why I hadn't done it before. But something at the back of my head told me not to; perhaps it was the whisper of Jones.

"Common shell!" I said; "give her one across the bows, but well outside of her."

There was an old four-inch drainpipe forward, but we didn't use that. We carried a three-pounder on each bow, and the shell kicked up a pretty little spurt about fifty yards ahead of the Dane.

He held on, with the sparks flying out of his smoke-stack. He must have known we had him set, though he took no more notice than if we were blowing him kisses. And then I fairly lost my wool. I wasn't the philosopher in those days that I am now. One couldn't have the beggar defying one like that.

"Give him another," I said. "Closer aboard!"

Wang! went the three-pounder again. The trawler stopped her engines and swung head to sea, and I saw the crew running about on her like ants when you stir 'em up with a stick.

"Stopped her that time, sir!" said Pym, grinning. "She shut down as quick as if she'd been hit."

"Lucky for her she wasn't," said I. And we ran down alongside her. As we came round her stern I saw the name under her counter—*"Sverige—Esbjerg."*

I didn't give more than a glance to that. I was looking at something different.

Just outside the Dane's wheelhouse lay a thing that looked like a lump of clothes—till I saw it was a man in a jersey and sea-boots, all broken and doubled up, and the deck round it was dark with blood.

The shell was a blind shell, but it had caught one of them. Pym hailed the trawler—my voice had dried up a

bit. Her crew was lowering a boat, and the skipper called out in English:

"Ja, I vos comin' to you!" he said. "You haf done your work vell, captain. You haf kill my mate!"

This was a long time ago, you know. Since then one has seen plenty of dead men, and a good many of one's own pals, too. One gets used to that.

But this was peace time. And this was my first dead man.

And when I saw that poor devil of a fisherman lying there all smashed up I felt physically and mentally sick. It wasn't only that the Admiralty would probably break me for it—you never know how they'll take an affair like that. It was the thing itself. I saw two of the crew lift up the body and carry it slowly down the hatchway.

The skipper was alongside in his boat. I told him to come abroad. He was a big ruffian, about fifty, with a tangle of red hair and whiskers. I took him to the chart-room.

"Vell," he said, "you vill haf to answer for dis, captain."

"Nobody can regret it more than I do," said I. "I would give anything if it could be undone, captain. The shell was not meant to do any harm, and I'm at a loss to know how it struck your ship. Why did you run for it? You have brought it on yourself."

"Ve vas nod doing any harm!" said the skipper. "My ship vos oudside der Scotch waters, as all mine crew can swear."

I told him it was no use taking that line. He was a mile inside the limit when we saw him, in a prohibited area to boot. For that matter we were in British waters still.

"Vell den," says the skipper very grimly, "ve vas your brisoners, and you vill haf to answer to my Government and to yours for der dead man dot is on my ship."

I didn't need telling that. I was envying the dead man. But I didn't answer him for a moment or two, and the Dane came up closer.

"See here, captain," he said, "maybe dere vas no need for you to be cut oud from der Navy, nor for me and my

ship to be brought in as brisoners! Suppose we settle it up between us, eh?"

I asked him what on earth he meant.

"Look see; der dead man haf a widow and children. Dey get nodings from your Government; dey vill say he was a poacher. But you gif me one hondred pound English for der widow, and leave it at dot. I got ay avvid my ship, der dead man he is buried at sea, and all go vell. You can trust your men nod to talk?"

I fancy neither of you fellows have been up against anything like that. When I got over the first shock of the offer, it was like a life-buoy to a drowning man. It looked so reasonable on the face of it. There was the poor chap's widow to think of. It seemed to be all one could do. On the other side was the enquiry, and the publicity and all the other beastliness, if I ran the ship in. With the moral certainty of having to leave the Service—even if I wasn't chucked out. And the first cause of it all was a few baskets of fish in the trawler's hold. But I think it was the widow I had in mind. What would you have done?

Strachan shifted in his seat.

"Don't care to pose as a moralist," he said. "I believe—I would have paid up."

Burdon-Lee nodded.

"I told the skipper I hadn't so much money on board," continued Venables.

"You haf your cheque-book, aind it?" said he. "Gif me a draft on your bank—dot vas goot enough for me."

My cheque-book was in the cabin, and I brought it up and started to fill in the cheque to "Self"—and then, somehow, I stopped, and chucked down the pen.

"No," I said. "Won't do. I'll take you and the body to Aberdeen."

I took a dekko at him. He was looking queer.

"You haf more sense, captain," said he. "You vill be disgrace and thrown out of the Service—more better we settle it up. Tink of der vidow!"

"I am," said I. "I'm thinking it's little of the money

she'll touch if it goes through your hands. This goes up to headquarters."

The fellow offered to take £50. He began to storm. He said he'd hold his tongue for nothing if he were allowed to go. I cut all that out and called to Pym.

"Mr. Pym," said I, "detail a prize crew and take charge of the trawler. Take station astern, and follow me to Aberdeen. The skipper will remain here with me."

"Ay ay, sir!" said Pym.

The skipper seemed inclined to break loose and go berserk, but my gunner's mate tactfully shepherded him down below. Just before Pym pushed off he allowed himself a word with me.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said sympathetically, "but don't let this worry you, if you'll excuse an old hand sayin' so. It was an accident an' you weren't to blame, nor the gun's crew either—we can all swear to that. You'd have been in the right if you'd sunk him, after he refused to heave to. It might come all right yet."

It was pretty cold comfort for me. While the trawler was following us astern, with Pym in charge, I thought it over. You know what the Admiralty are. It was a level certainty they'd make me the goat. And that wasn't the worst of it.

Nerves aren't a failing of mine. But I got 'em then. It was just gettin' dusk, and the trawler, snooping along behind us like a ghost, was worse than having the Flying Dutchman in tow. There was nothing missing. The crew had hoisted the Danish colours at half-mast as a sign of mourning, and there was a big black cloth over the hatch of the cabin where the dead fisherman lay. I was glad the skipper hadn't asked me aboard to view the body. I felt I couldn't have stood that.

To keep my mind off the question of resignation v. cashiering, I tried to think out what sort of a letter I'd write to the widow——

It was about ten minutes later—though it seemed like an age—that I sensed trouble astern of us. There was quite a little riot on board the trawler, and my prize crew

was mopping it up. It didn't take 'em long. I dropped back abreast 'em.

"What are you about?" I yelled through the megaphone. "Can't you keep order, man!"

Then I saw Pym coming up the hatchway with a large bundle in his arms.

"Beg pardon, sir! Got message of importance to communicate," he said. "Will you slow her and take me aboard?"

Wondering what on earth he was about, I had both ships stopped; the Dane's crew were jabberin' and protestin', but my quartermaster brought 'em to attention. Pym came off in the trawler's boat.

"Can I see you in the chart-room a moment, sir," he said, and in we went, Pym carrying his burden. It was wrapped in a sail-cover, and strippin' this off, he flung into my chair, a limp, inert body in a jersey and fisherman's boots. I pretty nearly jumped out of mine, for I'd got all I could stand.

"How dare you!" I said—and then I short circuited, for Pym was wearing a sardonic grin, like the figure-head of the old Medusa. I took another look at the body.

Its limbs were round an' thick, shapeless as sausages, its sea-boots were tied on with string, an' there was sticky red stuff on the jersey.

"What's this?" said I.

"That's the Dutchman you murdered, sir," said Pym, grinning in a disciplined way.

"Good lord! D'you mean to say it's a dummy-run?"

"Precisely, sir. A dummy-run it is, an' nothin' else."

I dropped into the other chair, opposite the corpse. When I had wiped away the tears, Pym reported. He didn't laugh—a grin was his limit.

"As soon as we'd taken station, sir, I took a look round, as you might say, havin' my suspicions. They'd mopped up the deck when I got aboard, but I know what red paint is, havin' seen it before.

"Havin' worked out the observation, I thought I'd take a look at that corpse laid reverently below. The Dutchmen

wanted to get in the way, but we soon put that right. I went down an' found this gory old effigy in a bunk, with some of the red paint still on him. They were just goin' to take him to pieces, but havin' more respect for the dead, I brought him away as he is."

I laughed till the scuttles rattled, while the body wagged in its chair—you'd have sworn it was laughing, too. Then I shook hands with Pym.

"Pym," I said, "you've more of the red distilled essence of strategy than the Admiralty War Staff. I didn't dream of a bluff. It looked so beastly natural."

"Jus' so, sir. From a bit of a distance it took us all in, an' I reckon they've played this game before; they've got the thing brought down too fine for new hands. They saw we were bound to catch 'em, so they put up this dummy-an'-red-paint evolution. Likely they thought they'd scare us into letting 'em go."

"That ruffian offered to take a hundred and say nothing about it," I said.

Pym coughed.

"The Admiralty's so squeamish nowadays, sir," said he, "otherwise the yardarm'd be the best cure for that skipper."

"I'm fed up with dead men," said I. "Carry on, Mr. Pym. We will proceed to Aberdeen. I shall see you get full credit."

Pym saluted, and went back to the prize.

The Danish skipper, watching through the scuttle of the artificers' mess-room below, had seen the body come aboard, and was wise. He requested an audience of me, and he was an agitated skipper.

"It was nodings but a choke, captain!" he said, gnawing his lips, "a choke——"

"Yes," said I, for I wasn't feeling vindictive any longer; "and you'll find it a pretty expensive brand of joke. You'll be lucky if that £100 you got last month covers your fine for fish-poaching. The less you talk the better for you."

I spent the next two hours blessing Pym. I wasn't the

first Loot-in-command who'd been hauled out of the gumbo by a warrant-officer—though one wouldn't say so in mixed company. The sea had given up its dead; I was entitled to laugh, and I did. But mine is a sympathetic soul, and I found time for a tear of pity, too.

Now I knew what happened to Jones!

This was the same trawler that the *Ocelot* had nabbed. Poor old Jones had given me the name—the *Sverige*. I remembered that now. It was as clear as a searchlight. The Dane had played off this stunt on Jones, and got away with it.

Knaves grow bold by success. The *Sverige* wasn't expecting another protection ship along so soon, and when I dropped on her out of the mist she tried the same game on me. It nearly came off.

Jones of the *Ocelot* had parted a hundred, and was wondering whether murder would out. No wonder Jones was down in the mouth! But then he was minus a Pym; that's where I had the pull. I was sorry for Jones.

Eighteen hours later, *Jaguar* and her prize made Aberdeen; the S.O. in charge—old copper-nosed Bickerstaffe, a great discipline and spit-and-polish man—came on board my flag-ship. His eyes bulged out like a land-crab's as he stood lookin' at a headless and crimson-stained dummy corpse, which we'd lashed to the fore-stay by way of a figure-head.

"Eh!" he gurgled. "What the doose? How—eh—what——"

"That's a peaceful fisherman, sir, caught guttin' haddocks in Scottish waters, and shot as an example to others," said I; "if you'll come below, sir, I'll explain."

We had out the wardroom port, and I explained. Bickerstaffe laughed till the old *Jaguar* started sheddin' rivets. And presently Aberdeen—which is a town unjustly accused of seeing jokes with difficulty—was laughing too.

Strachan drew a deep breath. "*The* most superb liar that ever passed out of Greenwich," he murmured.

Commander Burdon-Lee rose.

"Ned," he said reprovingly. "I cannot sit here and

hear our Bolo accused. To my knowledge there is but one mis-statement in this little report of his."

*"One?"*

"Yes, one. It is not true that Jones left the Service.

"I am 'Jones'—sometime of the *Ocelot.*

"Bolo relieved my mind of the guilt of blood, not that I worried about that, I'm not as tender in the heart as Bolo, and the fear of getting hauled over the coals, by sending me a packing-case per passenger train carriage paid. It contained the limp dummy of a fisherman, and it had cost me a cold hundred.

"With it was triplicate indent note: 'Corpse, Danish, one in number,' signed 'Bolo.' It was very thoughtful of Bolo."

# ANTHONY WYNNE

## THE TINKLE OF THE BELLS

Doctor Hailey glanced at the heavy type and then let the newspaper, which he had just bought, fall to the floor of the car. The shouting of the vendors of early editions containing this bombshell mingled in his ears with the deep roar of the traffic in Regent Street. He could see the eager men and women clutching at the sheets and devouring the unwelcome news.

Then he closed his eyes and beheld again the lovely dark face of the girl who had been his partner at dinner the night before and who had confided to him that The Wizard was bound to win the Derby because she had dreamed that she saw him passing the post a length ahead of the rest of the field. Zazel Belamy had added that the fact that she had Romany blood in her veins made her dreams well nigh infallible.

So much for Romany blood!

His mind drifted to the owner of the racehorse whose victory, until this minute forty-eight hours before the great race, had been regarded by the whole country as assured. Lord Steadhouse was too good a sportsman to resent any blow which fortune might deal him; but if this blow was really serious it would test his courage to the very utmost. The Wizard was more than a likely colt; he was a supremely great horse whose name already had achieved imperishable glory.

The car drew up in the throng at Oxford Circus. The buyers and the sellers of news were so busy here that they risked their lives every moment, rushing in and out of the

(From "Sinners Go Secretly," by Anthony Wynne. Copyright, 1927, by J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, and by Hutchinson & Company, London, England.)

maze of traffic. Consternation was on every face, as though some national calamity was immediately toward. It was like scratching of the Tetrarch over again, with added emphasis. Even the policemen on point duty waved their directions with less than their usual aplomb. He caught, through the open window, the remark of a 'bus driver to one of his colleagues: " 'Oo says Centaur now for a win? Eh, Bill?"

Next moment his car was gliding up towards Portland Place. It swung through Queen Ann Street and came to his door. He picked up the newspaper to give to Jenkins, his butler, whose distress he scarcely dared to contemplate. Jenkins' love of race horses was as profound as was his own ignorance of everything about them.

"A telegram for you, sir."

He took the yellow envelope and opened it. Then, as he glanced at its contents, an exclamation of astonishment escaped him. It was from the owner of The Wizard, Lord Steadhouse, and ran:

*"Can you come immediately The Yewtrees? Deeply anxious and bewildered."*

He handed the telegram and the newspaper together to his servant and stood awaiting the shock of surprise which he knew must follow. When it had subsided a little he asked:

"Well, what do you make of it?"

Jenkins, who remained permanently under the influence of his Nat Gould, drew a sharp breath.

"The 'orse 'as been done in," he declared in a hoarse whisper. "Not a doubt, sir. And it's as a detective and not as a doctor that 'is lordship is asking your 'elp."

That view expressed the situation with great exactitude, as Doctor Hailey encountered it some hours later at the old house on the edge of Newmarket Heath. Lord Steadhouse met him in such a state of agitation as he had not believed possible in a man naturally so self-possessed. He conducted him at once to his smoking room, the door of

which he closed with great care behind them. Then he declared:

"My dear Hailey, there has been foul play here. The very worst of foul play. It is a miracle that the horse has not been scuppered."

The seaman's term, a heritage of his naval service, came from his lips with intense bitterness. Then, suddenly, his expression of anger changed to a look of bewilderment. He added in low tones:

"But in a manner so mysterious that I can make neither head nor tail of it, which must be my excuse for trespassing on the genius of an old friend."

Doctor Hailey had seated himself and found his snuff-box. He took a pinch before he asked for such details of the supposed outrage as were available. The eagerness in his voice made short work of the idea that he had sacrificed himself in any way in coming to the Yewtrees. This eminent specialist in diseases of the human mind was possessed by a passion for the study of mental deformity, as exemplified in crime, which nothing could quench.

"We made the discovery this morning," Lord Steadhouse declared. "The Wizard was found shivering with fear in a corner of his box, his nerve apparently quite gone. I sent for the vet. at once, and he declares that there can be no doubt the colt has suffered some terrible fright. We decided, there and then, to postpone his going to Epsom till to-morrow. But even if he runs I don't believe now that he has a chance."

He paused and the look of perplexity in his eyes deepened.

"It is scarcely credible, in the circumstances, but nevertheless it seems to be absolutely certain that nobody entered his box during the night. There is not a sign, not so much as a suggestion, of any tampering with locks or bolts."

"Does that apply also to the windows?"

"Absolutely. In fact, the largest window has been nailed down. The others are too small, in any case, to enter by, but they were all closed except the skylight and they

have not been disturbed in any way. There is a spider's web intact between the skylight and its frame."

Doctor Hailey took another pinch of snuff.

"I don't pretend to know very much about horses," he said, "but I have heard that they are subject to brain storms, just as certain highly-strung men and women are. It is not possible, is it, that The Wizard was afflicted in that way?"

Lord Steadhouse shook his head. "Oh, no. Quite impossible," he said. "The colt must have shown some signs of nervousness before this if he possessed that trait in his character. As a matter of fact he has never, on any occasion—and remember that I bred him myself—given us the least anxiety. His sire, Permutation, as perhaps you know, had the reputation in his racing days of being the best-tempered horse in training: his dam, Mayfly, I can vouch for myself."

He took a sharp turn across the room and back again.

"Something," he declared in tones of deep conviction, "happened last night. But what it was or how it happened is the most complete mystery of which I have ever had any knowledge."

"One question more and I will ask you to take me to the stables." Doctor Hailey had risen and was standing an immense figure with his back to the empty fireplace. "Did anybody hear anything during the night? I mean any of the stable boys or employees?"

"Not that I know of. One of the lads told me that the owls were hooting very loudly. But that happens here too often to frighten a soul."

They walked through the shrubbery to the group of buildings in which Lord Steadhouse's race horses were accommodated. A man, whom his host introduced as his trainer, Wills, was standing in front of one of the loose boxes.

"I fancy he's a bit quieter now," he told Lord Steadhouse. "I have been listening and haven't heard anything at all."

"There is no further light of any kind?"

"No, nothing."

The man indicated the windows and showed the doctor that the dust on their sills and fastenings had not been disturbed. They were protected below by a wooden lattice which must have effectually prevented any attempt to enter the box through them. He turned to the door and called attention to the heavy locks none of which had so much as been tampered with. Then he opened the upper section very quietly. The Wizard was standing well away from the door. He turned his beautiful head sharply and immediately seemed to shrink, as from sudden danger. They saw a tremor of fear sweep over him. The light was reflected in wonderful undulations from the uncovered portions of his lithe black body. Doctor Hailey felt a sense of quiet and poignant regret. It would, indeed, be calamitous if so perfect an instrument should be turned from its purpose. He glanced at the pale weary face of the trainer beside him. Wills looked like a man who has seen the utter ruin of his life work.

He was a quiet fellow, of the lean and loose-jointed type, whose reputation had not, apparently, affected in the smallest degree the natural simplicity of his character. It was quite obvious that he sorrowed for the horse more than he sorrowed for the race. He spoke to it in gentle, reassuring tones until the tense fear of its pose had relaxed a little. Then he opened the lower portion of the door and entered the box. Lord Steadhouse signed to Doctor Hailey to follow. He was in process of indicating the condition of the locks and windows when his trainer uttered an exclamation of amazement and horror.

"Good heavens, look at this!"

They came to where the horse was standing. Wills had lifted the blanket from The Wizard's flank and was pointing with his free hand to a tiny area on the glossy black coat from which the hair seemed to have been pulled away. The skin at this place was reddened and the surrounding hairs glued together, evidently with blood. Lord Steadhouse gasped:

"A wound!"

"It must be. I don't think the horse could inflict such an injury on itself."

Wills rolled the blanket further back and then added: "I examined his legs carefully this morning, but it didn't occur to me to look under the blanket, seeing that there was no sign of a tear or even a scrape."

He stood back to allow Doctor Hailey to approach nearer. The doctor raised his eyeglass and focused it on the injured skin. Then he passed his hand down the animal's flank.

"The scrape is a superficial one, I think," he said. "The curious thing about it is that it seems to have been inflicted from above downward—and yet one would have imagined that the blanket, in that case, must be torn also."

"It is not torn. It is not even cut. That was why we had no suspicion."

Wills' tones were strained and difficult. He added: "Apparently the scoundrels lifted it before inflicting this wound."

Doctor Hailey moved to the other side of the horse and examined the opposite flank. Then he ran his hand along the animal's ribs and over his forequarters to his neck. As he came to this The Wizard started slightly, as though he had been hurt. He focused his eyeglass again and saw another, similar scrape on the shining skin. It was almost completely covered by the animal's mane. He called his companions' attention to it, and then, leaving them to complete the investigations, made a fresh survey of the doors and windows of the box.

That yielded no further information. He returned to the stable yard where a boy stood regarding the loose-box with melancholy eyes. He beckoned the lad and asked him to conduct him right around the group of buildings.

A wide paddock stretched behind The Wizard's stable. It was empty and the new grass seemed to be entirely unruffled. The doctor searched it in vain for any sign which might afford a clue to the mystery. He told the stable lad to go across the field and examine the fence on the opposite side for indications of attempts to scale it.

He himself walked to a clump of trees situated about a hundred yards from the back of the loose-box.

Nothing rewarded this joint effort, and he returned to the stable. He found owner and trainer still busy with their examination of the colt's skin. They had located a third injury and further had discovered a number of tender places on the animal's neck, small swellings as though blows had recently been inflicted.

Doctor Hailey examined these latter with much greater care than he had bestowed on the scrapes. At his request, the hair covering one of them was gently clipped away by the trainer. There was disclosed a row of tiny abrasions, one at least of which had penetrated the surface layers of the skin. Wills glanced up suddenly at the roof and then cried out in horror:

"Good God! That must be the explanation. It would be quite easy to throw stones down through the skylight."

"It would not, however, be easy to climb on to the roof." Doctor Hailey turned as he spoke and fixed his rather vacant eyes on the trainer's face. "I have just been looking to see if a ladder has been used recently. There is no sign of it."

He completed his examination and let his eyeglass fall.

"There is no opening anywhere, is there," he asked, "large enough to admit the barrel of an air pistol?"

"None."

"In that case we had better re-examine the roof. And then perhaps the boy can be told off to search the tan on the floor here for stones or anything else he can find."

A ladder was brought and Doctor Hailey mounted it. The spider's web of which Lord Steadhouse had spoken remained in position between the frame of the skylight and the window, though it had been broken slightly at one side. He obtained a clear view of the horse below. He called to Wills to raise the window, by means of the cords which ran down into the loose-box, and when this was done he threw a coin against one of the walls below. The colt scarcely seemed to notice this action. Nor did it show any sign of anxiety when the action was repeated.

"Now shut the window, will you?"

As the glass sank into position he tapped sharply on it. And still The Wizard remained unmoved. He descended to the ground, where Lord Steadhouse was awaiting him with the utmost eagerness.

"Well?"

"You saw for yourself. Throwing things from the skylight has no effect on the horse. Had that been the initial cause of his terror there must have been an immediate reaction."

Lord Steadhouse glanced admiringly at his friend. He had not understood the meaning of the tests which he had just witnessed. He nodded his agreement.

"Yes, undoubtedly," he said. "Anything that has frightened a horse once always frightens it a second time, and a third and a fourth, always." He sighed deeply, adding, "so that we are no nearer the solution of the mystery than we were before."

They returned to the house to dinner. Doctor Hailey confessed himself entirely at a loss. He went to bed early because there remained the faint hope that what his reason denied him, his sleeping brain might afford; some clue, perhaps, seen without being consciously observed. He passed in review in his mind all the circumstances of the case, and he was engaged in the process of brain stimulation when he fell asleep.

The process resumed itself automatically when, three hours later, he sat up in bed listening. Footsteps, very light footsteps, but clearly defined and unmistakable nevertheless, were passing on the flagstones under his bedroom window.

He rose and came swiftly to the open casement. He glanced out across the old-world garden towards the block of the stables which showed up as a dark stain on the lightness of the moon-flooded earth. The garden was empty. He could trace the path leading from the house to the stables in almost its whole length, and even the path which joined it, just under his window and which formed a short cut to the main road.

He stood gazing out, with troubled eyes. There could be no doubt about the footsteps, yet it seemed improbable that their author could have made so swift an escape from the garden. The steps had been rather slow, almost halting. Suddenly he caught his breath.

From behind one of the bushes which flanked the path a figure had appeared—a woman.

She seemed to be young, but he could not assure himself on that point. She stood a moment irresolute, then she moved slowly in the direction of the stables, with downcast eyes.

Doctor Hailey uttered an exclamation. He retired into the room and hastily pulled on some of his clothes. He crept out into the silence of the old house and descended the stairs to the front door. With an infinitude of precaution he pulled back the bolts and turned the key in the lock.

The moonlight, as he pushed the door open, caused him to draw back for a moment, so bright and pitiless was it. He glanced out cautiously to assure himself that there was no hidden watcher on this side of the house. Then he crept cautiously along the edge of the flower-bed which lay between the path and the wall of the building. This brought him to a point not far from his bedroom window. He waited, with his eyes fixed on the distant part of the garden.

It was obvious that the intruder had left this area, because no sound of any sort broke the wide stillness of the night. He moved down the path leading to the stables and came to the bush behind which the woman had sheltered. He hesitated whether or not to examine the ground with his lamp, but decided finally against that course.

The pathway at the far end of the garden was barred by a gate, but this, as he had observed on the previous evening, was not kept locked. He passed through it and emerged on the open paddock.

A moment later he had jumped back again among the shadows of the undergrowth. The figure he was following

was crossing the field on his left with the same deliberation which had characterised her movements in the garden. She came to a group of trees. At the same moment the hooting of an owl thrilled in the silence.

He waited, determined to challenge her when she should return. The boldness of the enterprise, carried out at a moment when suspicion was likely to be aroused to its highest point, amazed him. Was it possible that this visit bore no relationship to the injury inflicted on the race horse? Or again, could it be that those who had inflicted the injury believed that no suspicion of its real character would be entertained?

"Good heavens!"

He sprang forward; the woman he was watching had vaulted the fence which enclosed the paddock and disappeared out of sight.

A moment later he saw her again in the next field, apparently striking back towards the high road. That meant that she would pass the stables on her right and not return to the garden at all.

He turned back and ran towards the house. He reached the main avenue and rushed down it to the turnpike. Again he heard the shrill hooting of the owl which resented, apparently, this midnight intrusion on its solitude.

The high road was utterly deserted. He strode along it, keeping as far as possible under the shadow of the hedge. At the first bend from which a long stretch could be commanded, he stood for a moment, listening again. And then suddenly he threw himself down in the ditch.

A twig had snapped a few feet away from him.

A moment later he heard someone jump down into the road. He waited an instant and then leaped to his feet.

As he did so a figure darted past him, a young lithe figure, with a shawl bound about the shoulders, gipsy fashion, swift with the startled energy of a wild animal. The girl had obtained an advantage of more than fifty yards before he sprang in pursuit.

She maintained that lead in spite of his longer stride.

After a few seconds she increased it. They came to a sharp corner and she disappeared from view. He redoubled his effort and swung round the corner after her. Next moment he uttered a cry of amazement. The girl had turned to bay. She had thrown the shawl she was wearing about her face. With incredible, almost tigerish ferocity she rushed at him, bent low suddenly to avoid his grasp and seized him by the knees. He tried to slacken pace but his weight resisted that effort. He felt the ground slip from under his feet. Then he went crashing down head first on the surface of the road, clutching at his assailant as he fell.

For a moment his mind was darkened. When it cleared again, he saw that he was quite alone. In his hand was a piece of torn cloth. He picked himself up painfully and stood gazing with bewildered eyes on the empty landscape. Further pursuit, as he realised, was useless. He turned back towards The Yewtrees.

His head was cut slightly. He bathed it when he reached his bedroom. Then he undressed again and lay down. But now sleep refused to come to him. In its stead an intense activity of the mind compelled his thoughts towards the solution of the mystery which had been so violently thrust on them.

One thing was certain. This gipsy girl had been desperately afraid lest he should see her face. She had been ready, too, to go to any length rather than be captured. Her courage and her agility were above the qualities usually displayed by the class to which, apparently, she belonged. That idea dwelt in his mind, yet it offered no clue on which he might hope to work.

He got up as soon as the day dawned and went out again to re-investigate the scene of his discomfiture. He examined the ground carefully in the vain hope that some accident might have favoured him with a fresh piece of evidence. But there was nothing to be seen. He climbed the hedge and struck across the fields, taking the line which, as he guessed, the girl had taken when returning. from her search in the paddock. He reached the clump

of trees from which the hoot of the owl had come without having obtained the least enlightenment. He bent down to examine the ground.

A moment later he stood up again sharply and listened. A faint tinkling of bells was borne to him across the stillness of the morning.

He glanced about him with perplexed eyes. The sound seemed strangely incongruous, nor could he determine from what quarter it proceeded. It came, moreover, intermittently, as though some invisible hand shook the bells and then, again, desisted.

He waited a moment or two and then walked a few yards in the direction of the house. The sun had risen and its earliest rays quivered in the air. The whole sky was filled with new light. He stood, rejoicing in the wonderful spectacle.

The tinkling of the bells came once more to his ears.

He turned sharply, and as he did so uttered a cry of amazement. A few yards away, on a branch of one of the trees, was seated a very small monkey, clad in a coat of green velvet on which a great number of tiny metal bells had been embroidered. The bells gleamed in the sunlight.

He approached the little creature, which seemed inclined to be friendly. But just as he came below the bough on which it sat, it grimaced angrily and sprang away and with almost incredible agility hoisted itself from branch to branch, until he lost sight of it among the leaves. Then it reappeared again, swinging giddily far above him, its bells filling the morning with their diminutive notes.

He drew a sharp breath, and the dullness of his eyes was transformed momentarily to excitement. So this—*this*—was the explanation for which they had been seeking! This wretched creature, escaped no doubt from some gipsy van, had actually placed in jeopardy The Wizard's chance of winning his greatest race!

He stood with the wonder of the thing stamped on his kindly features. The monkey must have entered the horse-

box while the colt was out to exercise. Doubtless it fell asleep there, among the warm hay, and so passed unnoticed. He recalled the tiny marks on the horse's neck, the appearance and character of which had so greatly puzzled him; bites! The scrape, too, on the animal's flank, under its blanket, made, no doubt, when the monkey tried to jump from the ground to the plunging racehorse's back and missed its footing in the darkness. No wonder The Wizard, shut in with this little fury, had become terror-stricken. Again he started. And that, of course, furnished the complete explanation of the gipsy girl's midnight search. She was trying to find her lost pet. Possibly the owl calls he had heard had been her summons to it; gipsies were reputed to keep monkeys trained to steal eggs at night, and no doubt it was necessary to have some innocent-sounding way of recalling the marauders.

He thought with a sigh of regret of the terror his sudden appearance must have occasioned the poor girl. She must have supposed that her very life was threatened when she defended herself thus vigorously. He returned to the house and went at once to Lord Steadhouse's bedroom to offer his explanation of the mystery.

Next morning Doctor Hailey received an early summons to visit Mr. Jack Belamy in Belgrave Square. His sister, who spoke on the phone, declared that her brother had suffered from a severe fainting attack while getting ready to go to the Derby.

"We want you to tell him that he mustn't go," she added. "He flatly refuses to listen to anybody here."

As he drove down from Harley Street the doctor recalled the details of the case. Belamy was reputed to be a very rich man; he was tremendously eccentric and said to be a heavy plunger on the Turf. As so often happened in such cases, symptoms of mental strain had begun to show themselves, and during the last few weeks these had taken an exaggerated form. No doubt the excitement of Derby Day had proved more than his agitated nerves could stand.

The car stopped. He entered the big house and found

himself a moment later face to face with Zazel Belamy. Her beautiful, dark face was drawn with anxiety.

"My dear doctor," she cried, "it is so good of you to have come so quickly."

She advanced toward him and spoke in low tones, telling him how her brother had fainted on getting out of bed.

"We got a terrible fright at the moment. But happily he seems to have recovered now."

The door of the room opened as she spoke and the patient strode in. He protested in ringing tones against the absurdity of summoning a doctor. Nevertheless his lips were rather blue and he seemed a trifle unsteady on his feet. Doctor Hailey ordered him to go back to bed at once. Just then a child came to the door of the room and announced that the car was waiting.

"Please stay outside, Sybil," Zazel Belamy said in sharp tones.

The child frowned, and then, in a manner which proclaimed how spoiled it was, shook a punchinello toy it carried in its hand, so that the bells on the puppet's hat jingled harshly.

"I want to go now," it cried.

The girl turned to the doctor.

"My niece is crazy about going to the Derby," she explained, "and I should hate to disappoint her. We are rather late as it is——" She hesitated a moment. "So long as you can assure me there is no danger."

"Oh, no—no danger!"

Zazel Belamy hurried from the room. A moment later they heard a car start from the door. Doctor Hailey turned to his patient.

"It's the race, I suppose," he said dryly.

"My God, yes, doctor. I tell you I couldn't help it, I've taken tremendous risks." Belamy's big black eyes rolled as he spoke.

"The risk of your life included. As I told you when I last saw you, your blood pressure is dangerously high. If you do not give up your gambling habits nothing, I think, can save you."

The doctor's voice was stern. But he observed that his patient scarcely listened to him.

"It's that Wizard colt," he declared. "Never have believed in the horse."

Doctor Hailey cut short a confession which he could see was powerfully exciting his patient. He repeated his order that Belamy should go to bed and announced his intention of waiting in the house till he was obeyed. The man rang the bell for his servant and went upstairs. A few minutes later the doctor joined him.

He left the bedroom very shortly and descended to the hall. It was empty. He crossed to a table on which he had deposited his hat and gloves and was about to take these when suddenly his body seemed to stiffen. Lying folded on the table was a woman's shawl. With a quick, almost furtive movement, he put his hand in his pocket and extracted a small fragment of cloth. The fragment he had torn from the shawl of the gipsy girl on the road at Newmarket. He fitted the fragment to a tear in the garment before him.

It fitted exactly. A look of deepening concern appeared on his face. He caught his breath.

Then suddenly seizing his hat, he rushed from the house. Getting in his big Daimler car, he told the astonished driver to take him to Epsom, to the race course, adding:

"It is now nearly midday. There is not a moment to lose."

The drive seemed an interminable one. After Sutton was passed it became almost more than he could endure because of the traffic delays and stoppages. But at last, at 2.30, the car mounted the final ridge. The immense, wonderful Derby crowd, disposed in the great hollow of the Downs, was spread before him. He sprang out of the vehicle and strode down through the phalanx of motor omnibuses and charabancs to the course.

He reached it at a point on the straight very close to Tattanham Corner. The crowd was not dense here. He stood gazing over the heads of the people in front of him at the people opposite. Then he walked to the corner

and crossed the short course which tails off at this point. He mounted the hill, stopping every few minutes to repeat his scrutiny.

His face was flushed and his eyes bright. But the look of tense anxiety which had filled them since he left London remained. He kept glancing nervously at his watch and then at the distant height where, as he could see, the horses were gathering for the great race.

He managed to elbow his way to the railings at the top of the hill. At the same moment, like the earliest whisper of a storm, a muttered exclamation came from the vast crowd.

"They're off!"

He caught his breath. He leaned forward searching—searching with his horrified eyes, despair and wild hope mingled in his expression.

"My God!"

The sound of galloping hoofs came to his ears. He hesitated just an instant. Then, in spite of the yell of consternation which greeted his terrible foolhardiness sprang out on the race course and rushed across it.

As he came to the railings the galloping hoofs thundered near at hand. The tense silence of a mighty expectancy was in the air. He scrambled over and then, with a movement so swift that it was complete before the amazed spectators had time to prevent or protest against it, he snatched its toy from the hands of a child standing close to the railings and flung it far back across the heads of the crowd. The toy, as it was hurled away, emitted a faint tinkling of small bells.

At the same moment a gasp of horror held the mighty crowd in sudden and dreadful suspense.

The Wizard, who was galloping close to the rails, swerved away suddenly as though some nameless terror had struck at his heart. For a moment it seemed as though catastrophe, huge and overwhelming, was inevitable.

The next instant the colt had steadied himself. He swept out of sight into the straight and the roar of the multitude about the stands proclaimed already his march to victory.

Doctor Hailey had made his way back through the ranks of the crowd. As he reached the outside of it, the news that The Wizard had won was passed along. He searched the grass with his eyes a moment, and then finding what he sought, bent down and picked up the punchinello toy which he had flung away. He strode with it after the retreating figure of a young girl who was leading a child by the hand. He drew level with the girl and raised his hat.

"Your niece's toy, I think, Miss Belamy," he remarked.

Zazel Belamy's face was as pale as ashes. The words he had meant to speak, words which would have emphasized his execration of the diabolical cleverness she had shown, faded on his lips. He said merely:

"It would seem that even the lightest tinkle of a bell sets The Wizard shying. No doubt an association which recalls some former terrible experience to the horse's memory."

Again he raised his hat. He fell back among the crowd which flowed round about them.

Next morning the news of Jack Belamy's death was in all the papers. One of those vouchsafed to its readers the additional information that the dead man's losses, occasioned by the victory of The Wizard at Epsom, were believed to be not less than £50,000.

# THE WORLD'S BEST ONE HUNDRED DETECTIVE STORIES

FIVE VOLUMES

EUGENE THWING
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

## VOLUME ONE

PART TWO

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# THE WORLD'S BEST 100 DETECTIVE STORIES

## F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

### AN AFFAIR OF HONOR

MAJOR BRUCE, G. S. O. (Intelligence), Headquarters Staff of the strategically important Far Eastern base of Menangpore, was suddenly jerked out of the blissful Nirvana of his afternoon siesta to resumption of his temporarily forgotten identity. The telephone bell was ringing. He slid off his couch, in shirt and breeches, and went to the instrument.

"Hallo! Yes?" He listened. "Oh, hallo, Rolfe! What?—General wants to see me?—Right-o! I'll be along."

A minute or two later, girt once more in the official harness of Sam Browne over white tunic, his pith helmet large over his deep-tanned, efficient-looking features, he emerged from the shutter-darkened cool of his bungalow into the blinding glare of a 4 P.M. sun. He turned along the white road, inadequately shaded between its rows of stiff-fronded palms, which led, beyond the bungalows of the married officers, to Garrison Headquarters. A couple of native soldiers, solemnly stupid with a hose pipe, were getting gloriously wet as they changed its thick dust into mud that dried again behind them before they had moved on a dozen steps.

He frowned. But it was not at the two soldiers that he frowned. Beyond them, at the gate of one of the more distant palm-embosked bungalows, a rickshaw stood in readiness, was at that moment being entered by a lady

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clad in white from open parasol to shoe-tip. For an instant his pace slackened like that of a man instinctively impelled to turn back on his tracks, then he reaffirmed its briskness.

He and the rickshaw, now in movement, drew near to each other and, although he gazed determinedly in another direction, he had—he knew not how—a glimpse of her face above the bobbing head of the runner. Another moment, and she was abreast of him, the runner immobile at her prettily authoritative order.

"Frank!"

There was no help for it. Common courtesy exacted that he should stop, bring his hand up to his helmet in salute, school his voice to a polite ordinariness, conjure up some sort of smile.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Fanshaw." His eyes rested unwillingly on her face, its fresh young beauty yet unwilted by this tropic furnace. He felt, awkwardly, that he ought to say something more. "Isn't it too early for you to be out?" He kicked himself for the instinctive assumption of authority in his tone. "Better an hour later, you know," he added, in attenuation.

"I'm going to tea with the Padre's wife," she said, smiling at him, "and it's shade all the way. But I didn't stop you to explain that I'm not as mad as I look. I've already done that to Dick this afternoon. Frank!" her voice went serious, "come here! I want to talk to you."

He took a step nearer the rickshaw. "Well?"

"I've been waiting for a chance of a word alone with you for three months—ever since we came out—and you seem to be the one person I never meet except in a crowd."

"Yes?" he said, with a false innocence. He had seen to it, with a grim thoroughness, that they never should meet except in a crowd. "I've been pretty busy, you know."

Her eyes—such dear, honest eyes, they were!—caught his for a moment, looked into them.

"Frank!" she said. "I want—I've wanted all these three months—to—to ask you to forgive me. I treated you

badly, very badly, I know." She hesitated in the embarrassment of this avowal.

"That's all right," he muttered, looking away from her. "The best man won, I suppose."

She flushed a little, stopped herself—he could guess, as his glance came back to her—from saying, on a naïve impulse, how much she and Dick were in love with each other. He did not need her to tell him. He had observed it from his distance on the edge of the crowd, with eyes that could translate, self-torturingly acute, every touch and gesture that passed between her and her husband.

She broke the awkwardness of the pause. "We had no idea, Dick and I, when we married," she said, "that he would be sent to this station. He expected India."

"It's not your fault," he said, through his teeth. "It's just one of those little tricks that Fate plays upon people."

Her eyes went sympathetic.

"Perhaps Fate knows best," she said. "Frank—we've been pals even since I was in short frocks—won't you be friends still?"

"Of course," he managed to say, uncomfortably. "Of course."

"You won't bear a grudge? You'll still be the best pal I ever had? Shake hands on it?" Their eyes met, looked into each other's as she stretched out her hand to him. For one moment, as though he measured the gravity of what she asked of him, he looked into the candid beauty of her face, and then he reached up his hand to hers.

"I shake," he said, simply.

"And Dick?" she asked. "You'll be friends with him—real friends?"

He nodded. "If he wants me to."

"No. Whether he wants you to or not. For my sake. I can't be happy if I feel that my one bit of home out here is hostile to him. You promise?" She was exercising her old authority over him, the old authority of her charm that two years ago . . . He succumbed.

"All right," he said. "I promise. For your sake."

The sudden radiance of her face was—almost—full compensation.

"Thank you, Frank. That's all I want. You never broke your word in your life. You've made me so happy."

"I'm glad," he said. "And now," he smiled, "you've kept the general waiting!"

"Explain to him that you've done your day's kind action, and he'll forgive you. He's the dearest old soul, really. But I release you. You've promised—and you'll come and see us—not in a crowd?"

"I've promised," he said.

He saluted, and the coolie sped off along the white road with her. For one moment he stood looking after her parasol above the back of the rickshaw, and then he resumed his way. He took a deep chestful of the baking air, with incomplete relief, found himself quivering oddly. That first meeting, *tête-à-tête,* which he had so long dreaded, was over.

He went along the road with his surroundings fading out of reality. He was back in the dusk of an English summer evening, he and she together within the clump of willows that dropped slim fingers to the trout stream up which they had fished all day. He was trembling with the audacity of that utterance which all day he had been trying to phrase to himself with sufficient delicacy of approach, so freshly innocent of even suspecting it she seemed in her boy-like comradeship—that utterance which at last had burst from him, surprising him by its spontaneity, its almost brutal directness.

"By God, Nina—I'm sorry if I offend you—but I love you!"

And she had looked at him, and said nothing—until after he had kissed her, caught tight in his arms. And then she had whispered.

Two years ago! He had left her behind, pledged to be his wife, a miracle of newly perceived, almost awesome womanhood, intoxicating in her happy beauty, in her incredible reciprocation of his love, that he could scarcely identify with the little girl he had seen grow up in in-

terval to interval of leave from foreign service. He had come back to Menangpore to count off the days, to live through the three years—or it might be only two, if she came out to him—which he must endure until their marriage, endure with every fibre of his body craving for her, with his whole mind soaked in the thought of her.

They wrote, of course, by every mail—until that mail, eight months ago, which had brought the letter which had stunned him, so that since he had never felt himself really and fully alive. She had made a mistake—it had been that he had always been such a dear, good old pal—she had thought fondness—was—(she had knocked out that line without finishing it)—anyway, it was Major Fanshaw, home on leave from India, whom she was marrying, almost at once. He had seen an account of the ceremony in the *Times,* a little later. And then, for a supreme and savage irony, the humorously minded gods who whisper in the ears of the clerks of the A. G.'s Department at the War Office had sent Major Richard Fanshaw to join the Headquarters Staff, Menangpore. The same gods, nudging one another, had vetoed Major Francis Bruce's immediate application for a transfer.

Quite apart from this humiliating supersession, he did not greatly like Dick Fanshaw. In fact, no one in the garrison greatly liked him. The newcomer had not the knack of sociability. He was a thin-faced, reserved sort of man, absorbed in his own thoughts, alleged to be studious, efficient at his job, but quite useless on the polo field. It was a mystery beyond Bruce's comprehension how he and Nina had ever become intimate enough for even a proposal of marriage. Yet there was the fact—he had seen it with his own eyes—they were desperately, absorbedly. in love with each other.

Bah! He put the thing out of his mind. He'd promised Nina to be friendly with Fanshaw, and he'd do his best to be decent to him. If Fanshaw ever wanted a pal, he'd be handy—for Nina's sake.

He had arrived at the veranda of the white-painted Garrison Headquarters, and turned, on the steps, for a

glance at the view from this hilltop, to get another picture in his mind before attending to whatever business it was the general had for him.

Far below him, beyond the palms that framed the view, the deep blue sea stretched away to a heat-misted horizon. In the middle distance, a warship, tiny like a toy, was heading for the harbour. Close in, over the edge of the hill and abruptly diminished by the vertical distance, the stone arms of the new dockyard, untidy with cranes and scaffolding, were white upon the blue water. Native workmen swarmed over it like busy ants. He wondered how many spies were still among that horde. He had pulled out half a dozen of them already, for unadvertised and summary court martial—gallant little officers, for all their coolie rags, who had smiled inscrutably at the firing party. One could not help admiring them.

Restored to a professional frame of mind, he turned and plunged into the comparative darkness of the building, went along the corridor to the door inscribed "G.O.C." tapped and entered. The general, pipe in mouth, was seated at his big desk, signing busily the papers which Rolfe, erect by his side, was presenting to him. Rolfe looked up at his appearance, nodded amicably, a discreet smile on his big pleasant face—good chap, Rolfe, the antithesis of Fanshaw, with a cheery word for everybody, a man who worked hard and played hard, even went the pace a little, despite his weight the most brilliant polo forward in the Garrison—but the general, attending to one thing at a time as was his wont, continued to dash off one signature after another without a glance at him. Only when he had finished the last of the papers which Rolfe now gathered into a sheaf and handed over to a waiting orderly did he lift his head, acknowledge Bruce's prompt salute.

"Don't go, Rolfe," he said, as that officer went toward the door with the orderly. "I want you both. Sit down, Bruce."

The orderly closed the door behind him and there was a moment or two of silence as the general leaned back

in his chair and refilled his pipe. Bruce contemplated the strong-jawed face with the iron-gray moustache, whose eyes narrowed themselves in a pause of meditation in which he brought his thoughts to a focus while, deliberately, without hurry, he struck a match and surrounded himself with the smoke cloud of the first few preliminary puffs. It was a familiar enough face to him. In his three years of staff captain to General Sanderson's brigade in the old days in France, Bruce had learned to like as well as respect that grimly efficient personality which, though human enough off duty, would, when the occasion demanded, send men to certain death without a qualm yet never without a precisely achieved purpose that justified the sacrifice. Cunning as a fox he could be, too, as Fritz had more than once learned to his cost. The pause was at an end. The general's steel-gray eyes glanced comprehensively at his subordinates.

"Just see there's no one hanging round that door, Rolfe," he said, "and then sit down." His voice was serious.

Rolfe obeyed, went to the door, returned to take a chair at the side of the general's desk opposite to Bruce. They waited for his next words. They came with a quiet deliberation, between puffs at his pipe: "Can either of you imagine how any unauthorized person could have got at Plan C?"

The two men jumped in their chairs.

"Good Lord, sir?—you don't mean to say——?" began Rolfe.

Bruce said nothing. He just gasped in the shock. Plan C—he had seen it, of course; the general had explained it to Hathaway, Fanshaw, Rolfe, and him before locking it away—Plan C contained the diagrams of the submarine-mine barrages which would protect this most important base in war-time, together with the combination of cross fire from the batteries now being erected. If the potential enemy had got hold of those plans——! Good God!—— And only Hathaway, Fanshaw, Rolfe, and himself had been admitted to the secret of their existence.

Hathaway was dead, carried off in half-a-dozen hours by fever. But where was Fanshaw? Surely Fanshaw ought to be here also——

These thoughts, which went through him in a flash, were interrupted by the general's grim, quiet voice.

"That's precisely what I do mean to say. Someone has got at Plan C—and, of course, copied it."

"But—are you sure, sir?" said Rolfe, excited and incredulous.

For answer the general got up from his chair, went to the safe behind him, unlocked a heavy steel door with a key chained to his pocket, unlocked yet another door behind that, extracted from an inner drawer, locked by yet another key, a bulky envelope heavily sealed with red wax, brought it forward to them.

"This is a new envelope I sealed the other day," said the general. "Inside is the original." He tore it open, revealed another sealed envelope, ripped along one edge. "I cut it open myself when I found something was wrong. Now, gentlemen, our ingenious spy overlooked one little thing in his haste. Those seals are apparently quite all right. But when I put away that envelope, it had a fine hair tied round it, passing through the centre of the sealing wax. Is there any hair in that seal? There is not. Furthermore, the inner envelope was likewise tied round with a hair, and"—he extracted it—"you can see for yourselves that that hair has likewise disappeared. And for a final proof——" he pulled out several sheets of thin, blue paper, marked with curved masses of little black crosses and long straight lines that radiated from various points along a charted-out coastline, held it up to the light. "Do you see?" Close up to the edge in each corner was a minute pinhole where the sheet had been fastened out flat, presumably to be photographed. "Each sheet has those same little pinholes. I think that is sufficient evidence." He put back the plans in their envelopes, locked them again in the safe, turned to Bruce.

"Well, what have you to say to that?" he asked, with a grim smile.

"It knocks me over, sir," replied Bruce, "and it makes me feel somehow it's my fault. It's up to me to prevent that kind of thing."

"Precisely," agreed the general. "That's why I sent for you. You can't suggest any possible person?"

"No, sir. No one has any key to that safe but you." The general nodded.

"Quite. But someone has got at my keys, somehow—a whiff of a drug while I was asleep might have done it—these native thieves can get in anywhere—and taken an impression of them. There was that fellow you shot trying to break into your bedroom three or four nights ago, Rolfe, you remember?"

"The brute!" said Rolfe. "I just caught him slipping in through the window like a shadow."

"That's the kind of thing," said the general. "But observe! Only Plan C has been interfered with, and an ordinary native thief would certainly have helped himself to the considerable amount of cash which was much more in evidence than were the plans in the inner drawer. It is wildly improbable that any native could have distinguished one document from another, impossible that he should have picked on Plan C, copied it, and sealed it up again with the office seal. Whoever it was that got hold of my keys, he was only a subordinate agent, *employed by someone who knew that Plan C was in that safe.* And, apart from myself"—the general's probing eyes rested on each of them successively—"only four men were aware of that fact."

"It couldn't have been Hathaway," murmured Rolfe, screwing up his broad, honest face in cogitation of this problem.

"It could not," said the general. "Hathaway died six weeks ago. One of my little habits is to examine those envelopes every day. That envelope was interfered with just three weeks back."

"Three weeks!" exclaimed Bruce, in surprise.

"Three weeks," repeated the general. "I've been poaching on your preserves, Bruce—trying to do a little intelligence work in the meantime."

He had now seated himself again and relit his pipe, looking at them over the flame of the match. Bruce and Rolfe glanced at each other in uncomfortable embarrassment.

"Don't you think, sir," said Bruce, "that Fanshaw ought to be here too?"

"I did not invite Fanshaw," replied the general, ". . . *purposely.*"

"Good God!" The exclamation broke from Bruce in spontaneous horror. "Surely, sir, you don't think——?"

"Why—it might just as likely be either of us!" said Rolfe.

The general carefully put down his match in the ash tray.

"It might," he said, "and I confess that I gave some thought to that possibility. I went so far as to subsidize a burglar myself—for all three of you—a burglar that you didn't shoot, Rolfe." He smiled at him. "I was curious to know whether any of you had been doing any photography lately—and I took steps to find out within twenty-four hours of that envelope being tampered with. Your camera, Rolfe, I find, has a broken shutter and a thick layer of dust inside—you have evidently given up the hobby. Yours, Bruce, happened to be charged with a half-used spool. I developed those films and find they represent the Gymkhana which took place a couple of weeks before."

"That's where that spool went, then!" exclaimed Bruce, suddenly illuminated.

The general went on quietly: "Fanshaw's camera, on the other hand, a very excellent half-plate Zeiss, had no films in it. But it happened to have its focus adjustment left at three feet and closed up in the folds of the bellows was a certain amount of gray dust which, having once done a little photography myself, I recognized as magnesium ash."

"Good Lord!" said Bruce.

"I kept the camera and the ash as circumstantial evidence, if necessary," continued the general, "and, funnily

enough, Fanshaw thought fit to complain to me next day that someone had pinched his apparatus. Only he put the date of its disappearance as the day prior to that on which Plan C was tampered with. Since, however, my very excellent burglar found the camera in his room forty hours after Fanshaw alleged that he had missed it, I'm afraid the alibi won't wash."

"But surely, sir," objected Rolfe, "all this—even if it does look fishy—is very flimsy evidence!"

"Very," agreed the general, imperturbably. "But it happens to be reinforced. How much do you think Plan C is worth to—we won't specify the country?"

"They'd pay anything for it," said Bruce. "Twenty thousand pounds or more."

"Precisely. Or more. Now, Fanshaw was a poor man—I happen to know that he got into debt in India. I cannot discover that he has since come into any inheritance. Would his wife have had any money, Bruce?"

"Sir!"

"This is no time for fine feelings!" The old man crushed him with his sudden, formidable severity. "I know perfectly well that you were engaged to the lady. Did she have any money?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. I have been doing a good deal of private cipher work over the cables these last three weeks—and three days ago the sum of thirty-five thousand pounds was paid in London by bankers' draft from the Asiatic Bank to the London and North-Western Bank for the credit of a new account opened in favour of a certain John Smith by telegraphic instruction from Menangpore."

*"Phew!"* ejaculated Rolfe, mopping his brow. "Looks ugly!"

"But, sir," said Bruce, "how do you know that this John Smith is—— No, I can't say I like him, but I can't imagine Fanshaw doing it!"

For answer, the general unlocked the drawer at which he sat, produced a telegraph form.

"This is the original, handed in at the cable company's office four days back," he said.

*"'London North-Western Bank London please open account with draft Asiatic Bank thirty-five thousand letter follows John Smith Menangpore.'*

"This was handed in by a native who has not yet been traced. But note!—the message is typewritten and gummed on to the telegraph form—and it is written on a Yöst machine. There is only one Yöst machine in this garrison, and that happens to be in Fanshaw's office—the one he reserves for his own use. It is true, there are probably other Yösts in Menangpore, but no two machines, even of the same make, write precisely alike. I have personally copied this message again on Fanshaw's machine—here it is." He laid a typewritten slip of paper side by side with the cablegram before them; one looked like a carbon copy of the other. "You see—they are identical, the same weak *n* and *p*, the same worn *c*, the same *f* out of alignment."

"There is no doubt about it," said Bruce, handing them back after careful scrutiny, "but, sir—this is awful!"

"And the letter that follows," inquired Rolfe, "have you got that, sir?"

"That was stopped in the post last night," replied the general, taking another sheet of paper from his drawer. "Here it is. It doesn't tell us much. It merely confirms the cablegram, gives the specimen of the signature 'John Smith,' and orders the money to be held on deposit pending further instructions. It is typed on the same machine and addressed from the European Club."

"That doesn't mean much," said Bruce. "Everyone goes there. I was there myself yesterday."

"So was I," said Rolfe.

"So was Fanshaw," added the general. He leaned back in his chair, contemplated them grimly. "Well?"

"I don't know what to say, sir," said Bruce. "It is too terrible!"

Rolfe mopped his broad, honest face in evident distress.

"I suppose it means a court martial, sir?" he said.

The general smiled with the faintest twist of his lips.

"My dear Rolfe," he said, "you are sometimes an amazingly simple person. There is no doubt at all that our friend the possible enemy is already in possession of Plan C. Whatever happens, he mustn't be allowed to guess that *we know he knows it.* Plan C is actually already *ipso facto* obsolete. He must think it is still our real war plan and we in blissful ignorance of his stolen knowledge. A court martial would give him the hint—you can't keep secrecy over things like that. No. A court martial is out of the question."

"Then—nothing is to be done, sir?" queried Rolfe.

"Oh, yes," said the general, quietly. "We're certainly going to do something. We can't let people play games of this sort with impunity."

"What do you propose, then, sir?" asked Bruce.

The general kept them in suspense for a moment while he relit his pipe. Then he leaned forward, the match alight between his fingers.

"You and Rolfe are going to pay a little friendly call on Fanshaw this afternoon," he said, significantly. He help up the match before them, caught their eyes, blew out the flame. "Traitors sometimes commit suicide in a fit of remorse—*and leave a signed confession,*" he added, in grim elucidation.

Bruce jumped to his feet, found himself trembling violently.

"Sir—I can't do it!"

The general turned on him that gaze which he knew how to make suddenly terrible.

"What do you mean?" he asked, sternly.

Bruce felt himself like an audacious schoolboy under those insupportable eyes. But he nerved himself to confront them.

"Sir—I beg of you—choose someone else! It puts me in an impossible—a terrible position!"

The general's voice came at him like a clap of thunder.

"Major Bruce! Since when have you learned to disobey my orders?"

It was the same voice, the same inexorably hard face, aflame with eyes whose sudden blaze of authority annihilated opposition, with which—Bruce found it recalled to him by an odd trick of memory—at Devil's Wood he had ordered forward the remnant of his brigade to certain death over corpses already three deep. When General Sanderson commanded, men obeyed—without question. Bruce had obeyed then, forgetting the shrinking of his flesh in the storm of shells. He surrendered now, wretchedly, long habit of discipline asserting itself.

Wordlessly, eyes fixed on his, the general accepted his submission. He turned to Rolfe.

"Have you any objection to make, Major Rolfe?" he asked, harshly.

Rolfe stood twisting his handkerchief in his hands, his broad, honest face deathly white, perspiration pearling on his brow.

"No—no, sir," he stammered.

The general's face cleared to an expression that was more kindly. He turned to Bruce.

"I'm sorry to ask this of you, Bruce, but it can't be helped. In the first place, it's your job as Intelligence Officer. In the second, only you, Rolfe, and Fanshaw know anything of this business. We can't admit any more to it. Also, you understand, this is *unofficial*—an affair of honour, between officers and gentlemen. I send Major Fanshaw two of his own rank. I shall expect your report in half-an hour. And, remember, *a written and signed confession.*"

Bruce heard him as though he were in a dream. His mind held only one clearly definite thought: Nina! *Nina!* It hammered in him with every beat of the blood through his suddenly fevered brain. What would Nina think—Nina whom he had just promised—Nina whose happiness he was going brutally to annihilate? Nina! It made him feel sick. He could almost have wished that it were he

himself guilty of this unspeakably loathly crime rather than that it should be Nina's husband. Nina's husband! Nina's husband! God!—Nina's husband, whom she adored!

It was automatically, as in a dream, that he saluted the general and, with Rolfe, went out of the office; in an unreal dream that he found himself walking across the parade ground, in the blinding glare of the sun, toward Fanshaw's bungalow. Nina!—Nina's husband! He would rather have walked to execution than to the mission on which he was bound.

"Ruddy business, isn't it?" said Rolfe, thickly.

Bruce glanced at his comrade. The broad, normally cheery face was deathly white, beaded with damp. Good old Rolfe! He hated it, too. He was suddenly grateful for his companionship. Rolfe's thorough and well-known decency somehow sanctioned their errand. In his straightforward sense of duty, he had not jibbed at the general's order. It was true that Nina—Nina meant nothing to him, of course.

He failed to get a word out of his throat in answer, and they walked on in silence.

They were within a dozen yards of Fanshaw's bungalow when Rolfe turned to him.

"Oughtn't we to get our revolvers first?" he suggested.

"No." He could not trust his voice to more than curtness. "Unnecessary."

On the step of the veranda Rolfe clutched his arm, spoke again.

"You—you do the talking," he said. "It's your job. I'll back you up."

He nodded in mute acquiescence, summed all his will to steady the thumping of his heart, to find a voice to talk with.

They entered.

Bruce pushed aside a mat curtain, saw Fanshaw busy writing at his table. He glanced up at them with his lantern-jawed, tight-lipped, worried-looking face as they came within the threshold.

"Hallo, you fellows!" he said, rather ungraciously. "Paying visits? My wife's out—but you'll find the siphon over there." He jerked his pen toward the sideboard while his eyes went down again to the letter he was writing. "Help yourselves."

To Bruce's surprise, he found that he could speak.

"Fanshaw——"

Fanshaw looked up again irritably from the half-written word.

"Yes?" And then he saw the ghastliness of their faces. "Why—what's wrong?" His tone changed sharply to startled concern. "What in the world's the matter? You look perfectly awful, both of you."

Again Bruce found that he could speak.

"Fanshaw," he said, "we've come to talk to you—Rolfe and I. D'you mind if we sit down?" He felt that he must sit or fall.

Fanshaw stared at them.

"You'll find chairs there," he said, shortly. "What is it?"

They seated themselves, confronting him over his writing table. Bruce glanced up to the wall behind Fanshaw where a revolver holster was hanging from a peg.

"D'you mind—" he asked, awkwardly, "d'you mind letting me have your revolver, Fanshaw?"

Fanshaw stared at them, puzzled, and then rose, took the revolver holster from the wall, threw it upon the table rather peevishly. Bruce picked it up.

"Now, then, what's the trouble?" queried Fanshaw as he sat down again. "What do you want my revolver for? I can see by your faces that something is wrong."

Bruce dandled the heavy holster.

"Fanshaw," he said, "we—Rolfe and I—have come on a pretty rotten job. Plan C has been got at and copied."

Fanshaw frowned at him in incredulity. *"Plan C?"* he echoed. "Good God!"

"Pretty loathsome, isn't it?" said Bruce, between his teeth. He was beginning to hate that thin-faced traitor in front of him—a quite unsuspected fount of deep-

drawn instinctive hatred surged up in him—he would dare to try and bluff them, would he? If only he weren't Nina's husband! "Pretty loathsome, Fanshaw," he repeated with grim directness.

Fanshaw put up an amazingly good show of bewilderment—almost impressive, had it not been for the general's coldly logical, step-by-step demonstration.

"Good God! But the general slept with the keys fastened round his neck—he told me so himself!"

Bruce looked him in the eyes, tried to look into the soul of him.

"We don't want to go into that," he said. "We know all about it. The general has sent us, Rolfe and me, to settle the matter without a public scandal."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Fanshaw looked from one to the other of them, his face a study in lack of comprehension.

"You know—*"perfectly well!"* said Bruce. "The game's up, Fanshaw. There's no use bluffing. You're caught out. We've got the evidence."

Fanshaw stared at them.

"You've—got—the—evidence?" he said, slowly, in a tone that seemed to try to make it real to himself. "What evidence?"

"More than enough for a court martial to shoot you half-a-dozen times over," replied Bruce, succinctly. "Fanshaw, this is a rotten business. It makes me sick to have to do it. But for the honour of the army—for the sake of your own family—we don't want a scandal. We give you an easy way out. We want a written and signed confession—I give you my word that no one shall see it but the general—no one shall know anything about it—and then"—he drew the revolver from the holster, laid it upon the table, pushed it toward Fanshaw—"we'll leave you with this. You can pretend to have been cleaning it."

Fanshaw stared at the revolver, shrank back from it, looked up again at the two of them, a sudden horror in his eyes.

"You mean——?" he began.

Bruce pushed the weapon a little nearer to him.

"Precisely what I say, Fanshaw," he said, his words distinct despite the dryness of his mouth. "And no one —not even Nina—shall ever guess." He had used her Christian name unconsciously. "The episode will be buried —with you."

Fanshaw knocked away the revolver, jumped to his feet.

"You must be mad—both of you!" he cried. "Utterly mad!—I'm going to see the general at once!" He took a step toward the door.

Bruce placed himself in front of him.

"I'm sorry, Fanshaw. But it can't be allowed. The general sent us to you. He gave us half an hour in which to bring back your written confession." He glanced at his wrist watch. "Ten minutes of it have gone. You've made a bad break, Fanshaw—but own up, and play out the only decent game open to you. You ought to be grateful for the chance." With a strong arm he thrust him back toward the table.

Fanshaw stood looking at them, trembling suddenly, his face as white as theirs.

"Either you are both mad!" he cried, "or this is an infernal conspiracy to murder me!" He looked into Bruce's eyes with an insulting suspicion. "I can imagine that *one* of you has a motive," he said, deliberately, "though I should not have thought it of you."

Bruce winced as though he had been slashed across the face.

"Leave that out, Fanshaw," he said. "For just that reason I'd rather be dead than here. I'm obeying orders —don't make it harder for me. Will you write out that confession?"

"Of course not! I know nothing about it. If any one has any charges to bring against me, let them be brought forward in a proper manner—and I'll deal with them." He wrapped himself in his dignity as an officer, spoke with curt contempt.

Rolfe intervened for the first time in this colloquy.

"Fanshaw," he said, thickly. "You know that means a court martial—and I wouldn't give tuppence for your chance."

Fanshaw swung round on him.

"Look here, I've had enough of this! Clear out—both of you! And I'll trouble you, both of you, to meet me in front of the general!"

Rolfe shrugged his big shoulders, looked at Bruce.

"Well," he said, "I suppose if Fanshaw *insists* on a court martial, we're helpless. We can't compel him to write a confession. The only thing is to report it. We've done our best—and, for my part, Fanshaw, I'm glad of an excuse to be out of a very unpleasant business. Come along, Bruce!"

He took a step toward the door, was checked by Bruce's restraining arm.

"No," said Bruce, his teeth clenched. "We're going to stay here until we've done our job—and there's not going to be any public scandal in this business. Fanshaw!" —he looked him in the eyes—"for the sake of all that was ever sacred to you in the world—for the sake of your old school—the army—*for your wife's sake!*—play the man and own up decently. You haven't the ghost of a chance before a court martial, and, though they might not shoot you, the disgrace would be worse than death —for you—and"—his voice choked—"for Nina."

Fanshaw's look at him was an insult.

"Major Bruce," he said, "I shall be obliged if you will refer to my wife as Mrs. Fanshaw."

The three men jumped at a bright, girlish voice from the other side of the mat curtain. "Dick darling!—I'm back!—I've escaped!" There was a happy little laugh as the mat curtain was pulled back and Nina stood on the threshold. Her fresh young face lit up in pleasant surprise as she saw Bruce. "Why, Frank!—how nice of you to come so soon!" she exclaimed, coming toward him and stretching out her hand.

Bruce had one glance at her, and something seemed to smite him sharply, viciously, inside him. He turned

away his head, omitted to notice her proffered hand. He got his voice somehow.

"Fanshaw," he said, "will you please ask your wife to leave us? This—this is an official matter."

She came nearer, perceived Rolfe, who had turned to stare at a print upon the wall, and now nodded awkwardly to her. Her eyes went round the three men.

"Why—what is wrong?" she cried. "What has happened?—You look ghastly, all of you!"

There was a silence.

"Frank! What is the matter? What have you and Major Rolfe come about?" He did not reply, avoided her eyes. "Dick!" She clutched his arm. "Tell me!"

Fanshaw shrugged his shoulders, smiled unpleasantly at Bruce.

"My dear," he replied, "apparently some important secret plans have been stolen, and it seems that in some way or other it has been made to look as though I had done it. Consequently, Major Bruce and Major Rolfe have come here with the amiable proposal that I write out a confession and then commit suicide." Bruce set his teeth, stifling a groan. *The cad!* Not to keep it from Nina! Fanshaw went on: "Alternatively, I shall be condemned by a court martial."

She swung round upon Bruce in a flame of indignation.

*"Oh!"* she cried. "And *you* can believe this? *You* could come here to—to——" She made a gesture of horror. *"You* of all people——!"

He met her eyes—and wished that he were dead.

"I couldn't help myself," he managed to say. "I tried —not to have to do it. It was an order—from the general—to both of us."

*"But you believed it!"* You believed this of Dick!—You—you who promised me to be his friend—you did not tell the general that it was utterly impossible—you did not stand up for him—you—*you believed it!"* Her contemptuous indignation scorched him.

"I'd have given all I know not to—not to have had to believe it," he said, desperately, "but—but——"

"But what?"

"If I must—the evidence is too convincing!" He cursed himself for saying so much, even as the words were uttered.

"And what is this evidence?"

Bruce turned from her to Fanshaw.

"For God's sake, Fanshaw—I can't stand any more of this—either ask you wife to withdraw—or"—he gestured abandonment to disaster—"we must let matters take their official course."

Fanshaw was the least perturbed person in the room.

"I should like to hear your precious evidence myself," he said, with an unpleasant curtness of tone. "Tell her!"

Bruce looked again at the woman whose happiness was the one thing in the world that mattered to him.

"I insist!" she said. "And I have a right to insist!"

He surrendered to the look of proud authority in her pale face. "I'd infinitely rather not," he said, "but since so much has been said already——" He flashed a glance of scorn at Fanshaw. His face haggard with the long-continued strain, but with a succinct clarity, he told her of the tampering with the secret plan, known to Fanshaw, Rolfe, and himself alone; of the finding of Fanshaw's camera, with the focus set to three feet and flashlight ash still upon the bellows, within twenty-four hours after the plan had been copied and forty hours after Fanshaw had said he had lost it.

"But someone might have stolen Dick's camera, used it and put it back!" she exclaimed.

"They might," he agreed, "but that's not all." He went on to tell her of the banker's draft for thirty-five thousand pounds paid by the Asiatic Bank to the credit of a new account opened in an assumed name by cable from Menangpore and confirmed by letter. "And," he concluded, through his set teeth, "both cablegram and letter were typed on your husband's Yöst machine which he uses personally."

"Good God!" ejaculated Fanshaw, mopping his face with his handkerchief.

She had listened intently. "And is that all your evidence?" she asked.

"It's damnably convincing, Mrs. Fanshaw—though I hate to say it. The man who got at that plan must have been either your husband, Rolfe, or myself. You can't imagine us coming on a job like this if either of us did it. And all the evidence piles up against——" He broke off abruptly, with a gesture toward Fanshaw. "The whole thing's too ghastly," he finished.

Fanshaw was about to say something when his wife checked him. Her brow was wrinkled with a sudden thought.

"Wait a moment," she said. "What was the name of the bank in London and what name was on the cablegram?"

"The cable was sent by someone signing himself John Smith to the London and North-Western Bank."

"*John Smith?*" She gave a little cry of triumph. "And who handed in that cablegram?"

"A native who has not yet been traced."

"Then perhaps I can throw some light on it. Four days ago, after dark, when I was sitting on the veranda, a native came wandering up the road and asked me, in broken English, if I had seen a certain officer. I could not understand him very well at first, and as he had a piece of paper in his hand I made him show it to me, thinking that it would give the name. That piece of paper was the receipt from the cable company for a cablegram sent to the London and North-Western Bank by John Smith. I didn't know the name, and I asked him if he was sure it was 'Smith' he wanted. He said: 'No —no—Major Sahib Roff—*Major Sahib Roff!*' And I sent him along to Major Rolfe's bungalow!"

"That's a lie!" Rolfe burst out, furiously, "A stupid lie!"

"Steady, Rolfe!" said Bruce. "You forget you are speaking to a lady."

"She'd tell any yarn, of course, to save her husband—and it is a lie!" Rolfe reiterated.

"That same evening," she went on, coldly ignoring the interruption, "we heard that Major Rolfe had shot a native who was trying to burgle his house."

"That's true enough," exclaimed Rolfe. "I just caught the brute as he was clambering through the window. But the other is sheer imagination. Look here, Bruce, I'm not going to stay here while Mrs. Fanshaw invents red herrings to draw across the trail. She can tell that story to the court martial. I'm going back to the general to report that Fanshaw refuses to sign a confession. Come along!" He took a step toward the door.

"No!" cried Mrs. Fanshaw. She stepped in front of him with a quick movement, blocking the doorway. "You will please wait a little, Major Rolfe!" she said, and then turned to Bruce. "Frank! Supposing—I only ask you to suppose—that Major Rolfe was the one of you three who sent that cablegram, and that he still has the receipt in his pocket—is it safe to let him go out of here, and perhaps destroy it? It might be the one piece of evidence that could save Dick."

"Nonsense!" said Rolfe, angrily. "It is a monstrous suggestion! Please let me pass, Mrs. Fanshaw!"

She ignored him, looked at Bruce.

"Frank! I want you to search Major Rolfe before he leaves this room."

Fanshaw interposed.

"My dear, whatever you think—one can't do things like that. You can't expect Bruce to insult a brother officer on your mere supposition. But"—he glanced sharply at Rolfe—"in view of what you have said, we will all accompany him to the general."

She turned to her husband.

"Dick," she said, "you are under suspicion, and anything you say or do may harm you. Leave this to me." She looked again at Bruce. "Frank! Please do as I say!"

Bruce hesitated, glanced at Rolfe who was red with indignation, his hands working irritably, as he stood unable to pass Mrs. Fanshaw without sheer violence to her.

It was impossible—fantastic! No man could have come on such an errand if he were himself guilty. He despised himself for even momentarily admitting the suspicion.

"But, Mrs. Fanshaw, what you ask of me is outrageous. Rolfe and I have been friends for years. It is unthinkable that he should have done it. You must have been mistaken about that native."

"I am not mistaken," she replied, doggedly. "Frank, things have been made to look black for Dick. He needs a pal—badly. To-day you gave me your word. Are you going to break it?" Her eyes challenged all he had ever felt for her.

He took a long breath, looked at Rolfe—cheery, thoroughly decent Rolfe, who now stood outraged by this diabolical supposition. All the long years of their intimacy rose up in protest. Insult him for that man he had no doubt was guilty, that man he had to keep himself from hating—Nina's husband? Nina's husband! Yes —*just because of that!* There was just one faint, improbable chance. He had to have it. He turned to Fanshaw.

"Fanshaw, before I insult Rolfe, I ask you—before God—whether you sold that plan?"

"Before God," replied Fanshaw, with sober emphasis, "I did not."

Bruce twisted himself round to Rolfe.

"Rolfe," he said, "I hate to even seem to suspect you of such a horrible thing, but I must ask you to let me go through your pockets."

"Certainly not!" said Rolfe, indignantly. "I have just as much right to search you! Mrs. Fanshaw can make her absurd accusation before the court martial—and the court will decide whether Major Fanshaw is guilty or not. But I'm certainly not going to submit to the indignity of letting you go through my private papers without any authorization whatever!" His broad face was livid with anger.

Bruce placed himself in front of Mrs. Fanshaw, blocking the doorway. For the first time, a real suspicion shot up in him.

"Rolfe," he said, steadily, "I am certainly going to search you—even if I knock you down for it."

"You'd better try!" replied Rolfe, in furious scorn. "I'm going straight to the general—and I advise you to stand away from that door!"

Bruce smiled. The next moment Rolfe had rushed at him, and, rushing, met a straight left from the shoulder. He went with a crash to the floor.

Before he could stir, Bruce was on top of him, one hand on his throat, the other going through the pockets of his tunic. He extracted a letter wallet, held it out to Mrs. Fanshaw. She took it, went to the window, examined it, uttered a sharp little cry.

"Here it is!"

Bruce got to his feet, reached for the revolver on the table, held Rolfe covered.

"What is it?" he asked. "Here, Fanshaw, take the gun and see he doesn't rush."

He went to the window, took the two pieces of paper Mrs. Fanshaw handed to him. One was the receipt from the cable company; the other was covered with evidently practice signatures of "John Smith." He turned to Rolfe, who had also scrambled to his feet and stood sullenly scared and silent under the menace of Fanshaw's weapon.

"Have you got anything to say?"

An ugly word was the only answer.

Bruce addressed himself to Mrs. Fanshaw.

"Mrs. Fanshaw," he said, with a quietly grim politeness, "will you now please leave us. You have played your part. Dick and I will do the rest."

She went straight out of the room. The three men, left alone, stood looking at one another in a pause of silence. It was Bruce who broke it.

"Rolfe," he said, curtly, "I once had the honour of serving under your father. He was a gallant gentleman. For his sake, I give you the chance the general sent us to give Fanshaw." He pointed to the table. "Sit down—and write! And afterward Fanshaw and I will see you as far as your bungalow."

Rolfe stood staring at him, a little foam upon the lips of his broad white face. For a moment he looked into Bruce's eyes, measured the inexorability of that decision, and then, slowly, unsteadily, he walked toward the writing table.

. . . . . .

The general was still at his desk, leaning back in his chair, blowing meditative smoke rings toward the ceiling, when Bruce entered, saluted.

"And Rolfe?" he asked, as his eyes came down to Bruce's solitary figure.

Bruce stepped forward, handed him a written sheet of notepaper, pointed shakily to the signature at the bottom.

"Here, sir," he said, in a voice that lacked steadiness for all his effort at self-command.

The general contemplated it, shifted his pipe from one side of his mouth to the other, bit upon the stem.

"H'm!" he said. "And afterwards?" He looked up at him.

Bruce blew out an imaginary match.

The general nodded. Methodically, he folded up the paper, put it in an envelope, sealed it, and locked it up in his drawer. Then he smiled grimly.

"A bad hat," he said. "I was pretty sure he was the man, but everything pointed to Fanshaw. Rolfe's frontal defense was as good as impregnable. And we learnt in France, I think, not to make frontal attacks on impregnable defenses. There's nearly always a way round."

Bruce stared at him. "Then you guessed, sir?"

The general shrugged his shoulders. "It was one of the two. I knew Fanshaw wouldn't sign if he were innocent, and I sent you to see fair play. The art of war, my dear Bruce, is the art of producing sudden crises and taking measures to profit by them. You can never foresee exactly how you'll do it, but you nearly always get what you want—if you put the right man on the job. In the very special circumstances"—he smiled significantly —"I knew you were the right man."

# F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

## THE FOURTH DEGREE

SEBRIGHT of Scotland Yard sat in our office. He had dropped in, as he often did, unofficially, for a friendly yarn.

"Unpleasant business round at the Foreign Office this morning, Q. Q.," he remarked, as he helped himself to one of the excellent cigarettes which the Chief, though a rigid nonsmoker himself, kept hospitably for his visitors. "I suppose you've heard?"

Q. Q. raised his eyebrows.

"No," he said. "What's the trouble?"

"Arbuthnot shot himself."

"Arbuthnot! Shot himself?" The Chief's voice was at once startled and incredulous.

"Yep." Sebright nodded casually, and then savored again the aroma of the cigarette between his fingers. "First-rate brand, these of yours, Quayne. Where do you get 'em?"

Mr. Quayne ignored this cold-bloodedly irrelevant question. He leaned forward across his desk, in a curious sudden alertness of expression that in any other man I should have called excitement. But Q. Q. was never excited. Merely that ice-cold brain of his, at the appropriate stimulus, could function with lightning rapidity, leap from analysis to synthesis, from clue to hypothesis, from a seeming normality to the perception of a hidden crime, with a swift accuracy that left me, despite his painstaking training, always bewildered. In this case, he had some reason for interest beyond the ordinary. Old Mr. Arbuthnot of the Foreign Office had sat in this room only yesterday.

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"My dear Sebright," he said, in a tone that made that gentleman look up, "are you quite sure?"

Sebright nodded again, this time more emphatically.

"Sure," he replied, still professionally nonchalant. "Saw him myself."

"I mean—are you sure he shot himself?"

Sebright stared at him.

"No doubt about it. One of his clerks was passing along the corridor—heard a detonation in his room—opened the door and rushed in—and there was Arbuthnot collapsed in his chair at his desk—bullet-wound through the side of his head—his own revolver lying on the floor, just as it had fallen from his hand. The clerk gave the alarm at once, of course. I was sent for—found nothing had been touched—clear case of suicide. The coroner's inquest may throw some light on the motive—no one at the F. O. could suggest any." He gave these details with a curt definiteness, finally disposing of a question that held no further interest for him.

The Chief pondered a moment.

"On which side of the head was the death-wound, Sebright?"

"The right-hand side, of course."

"You're certain of that?"

"Quite. You know his room—when you come in from the corridor, his desk is just to the left of you, and he sits with his back to the door, facing the window. The wound was on the side of the head visible as you come in—I remember seeing it at once, and accidentally kicking with my foot the revolver lying on the floor. It was the normal right-hand side, right enough."

"H'm!" Q. Q. grunted. "But not normal for Arbuthnot. He happened to be left-handed. It didn't occur to you to make inquiries on that point, I suppose?"

"Of course it didn't. People aren't usually left-handed." Sebright stared, startled, at Mr. Quayne as he made the admission. "Why, you are not suggesting—"

"Murder." Q. Q. uttered the word with a grimly succinct finality.

"But why—" Sebright still stared at him out of a sudden chaos of previously settled convictions. "What makes you jump to this conclusion? Who would want to murder poor old Arbuthnot?"

"My dear Sebright,"—Q. Q.'s tight lips twisted in a faint smile,—"only yesterday Arbuthnot sat in that chair. He had come to see me—privately, unofficially—and he was very much troubled. He was convinced that there was a leakage of secret information from his department. Arbuthnot was a queer old fellow, as you know. His one hobby, I believe, was the solution of acrostics and ciphers. He used to read solemnly through the agony-column of the *Times* every evening, while his wife sat sewing opposite him, and puzzle out the code-messages of all the illicit lovers who communicate through that medium. The evening before he came to me, he had had a shock. One of the messages he decoded conveyed to some one unknown a piece of highly secret information that could only have emanated from his department. The poor old boy was in a terrible state—he did not want to go to his chief with the news until he could at the same time indicate the culprit—he was of course, like most civil servants in a senior position, extremely sensitive to the honor of his department; it was heartbreaking to him to think it should be indiscriminately disgraced. He came to me for advice. He was to have called again today."

"Phew!" exclaimed Sebright, thoroughly perturbed. "This makes everything look different. I wish to heaven he had come to see me about it at once! I hate these stories at secondhand—I'd give a lot to hear him tell me all about it himself!"

Q. Q. smiled quietly, rose from his chair.

"He shall tell you, my dear Sebright. You shall hear, in his own voice, everything he told me—and we'll see what you make of it." He went across to a cabinet on the farther wall, opened a drawer, returned with a long black cylinder. "When a case is brought to me, I not infrequently allow my informant, unknown to himself, to tell it to the dictaphone at the same time. I have found,

more than once, a help to elucidation in listening to it repeated, precisely as it was originally told, when I am sitting here undistracted by his personal presence. One can have the vital points reiterated over and over again *ad libitum.*"

He sat down to his comfortably large desk, slipped the cylinder into a concealed slot, pressed a button which uncovered a long aperture in the side of the desk toward the room, pressed another button. There was a faint whir of a mechanism started into activity, and then:

*"One of my clerks must somehow have taken an impression of my key—"*

It was the voice—almost startlingly recognizable to me as I sat quietly at my own desk at the other side of the room—of Mr. Arbuthnot. It evoked immediately for me the image of that large-built man with a little pointed gray beard who had, only yesterday, sat in the chair where Sebright was now sitting. Sebright jumped, involuntarily.

"My God, Q. Q.," he said, "it's uncanny to hear him like that! Just as if he were still here!"

Q. Q. smiled quietly as he bent down to the cylinder.

"The needle wasn't quite at the commencement," he said. "We'll let him tell his story again from the beginning." He made the necessary adjustment.

It was indeed uncanny—even to me, accustomed to hear such repetitions from the dictaphone (Q. Q. did not use the usual ear-pieces; he had installed a loud-speaker to which he could listen while he paced up and down the room)—to listen to that dead man's voice repeated with lifelike accuracy in that still room. It was a deep, solemn, booming voice, a voice that would have made a bishop of its owner had he been a parson, a voice that came vibrant with natural authority. And that voice told the story all over again, precisely as I had heard it the day before from the man's living presence, just as Q. Q. had summarized it to Sebright. The record concluded on the energetically uttered phrase: *"He shall confess, Mr. Quayne—I am determined on it!"*

"Well, Sebright," remarked Q. Q., as he stopped the mechanism, "what do you make of it? You have heard Arbuthnot's own voice."

"I don't want to hear it again," said Sebright with a shudder. "Shut the thing off. It gives me the creeps. Remember, I saw that man lying dead this morning."

"Practice that imagination of yours, Sebright," commented the Chief with his grim smile. "It's essential in this detective business. . . . Well, what are you going to do on this information? Anything?"

Sebright was thoughtful for a moment, evidently reluctant to open up again a matter on which he had publicly pronounced his official dictum.

"Of course," he said, "Arbuthnot might still have committed suicide—in the distress, the sense of disgrace to his department, caused by his discovery."

"Do left-handed men usually shoot themselves on the right-hand side of the head, Sebright?" asked Q. Q. quietly. "I knew Arbuthnot very well indeed. I am prepared to ask that question at the coroner's inquest."

"That means a public scandal, Quayne—a lot of unwelcome limelight on the F. O."

"I dislike private scandals even more," said the Chief. "I regarded Arbuthnot as an old personal friend—and his murderer is certainly going to be found. Remand that inquest, Sebright—and if we present the murderer simultaneously with the coroner's verdict, there will be no scandal. There will be only praise for Scotland Yard."

"But how are we going to find him?" challenged Sebright, in exasperation. "There's not the slightest clue. The revolver is admittedly Arbuthnot's own—one he kept in his desk. The clerk who burst into the room immediately after the detonation found no one but the dead man."

"Who was that clerk?"

"Oglethorpe—the next senior to Arbuthnot. He was passing along the corridor—or so he says." Sebright stopped. "Of course, he might have—"

"What?"

Sebright was suddenly illumined with a theory. "Shot Arbuthnot with Arbuthnot's own revolver and dashed out into the corridor. There's no evidence, one way or the other. The corridor was empty. People in the vicinity heard the detonation, but before they could investigate it, Oglethorpe ran into the room where the other clerks were sitting and told his story."

"H'm!" Q. Q. stroked his jutting chin. "I know Oglethorpe. . . . How many clerks are there in Arbuthnot's personal department?"

"Six—including Oglethorpe."

"Do you happen to know if the other five were in the room when Oglethorpe entered it?"

"No. There were only three—it came out while I was questioning as to who had seen Arbuthnot that morning."

"Who were absent?"

"Johnson—he was away looking for a file in the Registry."

Q. Q. nodded.

"And the other man?"

"D'Arcy Vaughan—the next in seniority to Oglethorpe. He was out at lunch."

"You are sure of that?"

"Quite. He went to lunch at twelve o'clock as usual. The tragedy occurred at ten minutes past. I saw him when he returned—gave him the first news of it. . . . No, Q. Q.!" Sebright thumped his fist on his knee in emphasis. "If Arbuthnot was murdered—it could only have been done by Oglethorpe!"

"Why?" Q. Q. lifted his gray eyebrows.

"On his own showing, he dashed into that room immediately *after* the detonation. If the murderer were some one else, he must still have been there! He could not possibly have got away."

"H'm!" Q. Q. grunted. "I know Arbuthnot's room pretty well. I seem to remember that it has a large cupboard where Arbuthnot used to hang his overcoat. Allow yourself to consider another hypothesis. The murderer, hearing Oglethorpe come to the door, might have slipped

into that cupboard and dodged out again immediately Oglethorpe had gone to give the alarm."

"Might!" echoed Sebright contemptuously. "All sorts of things *might* happen. I consider possibilities only after I've dealt with certainties. What is certain is that one of Arbuthnot's confidential clerks was passing out information, that Arbuthnot knew of it and was trying to discover the source of leakage,—*did* discover it, perhaps,—that Oglethorpe had, next to Arbuthnot himself, the easiest access to secret information, that if Arbuthnot was left-handed he did not shoot himself, and that Oglethorpe was admittedly there in the room so soon after the murder that no murderer could have escaped from it—unless it was Oglethorpe himself, with his plausible story of hearing the shot while passing the door and then discovering the suicide." Sebright rose briskly to his feet. "I'm going to check up Mr. Oglethorpe a little, Q. Q.," he concluded. "And unless my intuition is much at fault, Mr. Oglethorpe is going to sleep in a police-cell tonight."

Q. Q. smiled at him.

"That intuition of yours is positively uncanny, Sebright," he said. "You may be quite right, of course. It may just as well be Oglethorpe as another. That it was one of Arbuthnot's own clerks who murdered him, I feel certain. . . . Do you mind my doing a little investigation of my own? It won't conflict with yours, and I have a personal interest in the matter."

"You can do what you like—so long as you don't scare away the game," replied Sebright magnanimously. He glanced at his watch. "I'm going to get busy—and I'll let you know directly I slip my handcuffs on the man."

Q. Q. smiled again.

"I'll do the same by you, Sebright," he said. "Well, the best of luck to you!"

The moment the door had closed behind Sebright's back, the Chief took up the telephone and asked for a number.

"Hello! . . . Yes. . . . Put me through to Mr. Oglethorpe, please. . . . Is that Mr. Oglethorpe speaking? . . . Good. This is Quentin Quayne—of the Q. Q. Agency.

Could you manage to snatch a few minutes, Mr. Oglethorpe, and come round and see me here—Piccadilly Circus—as soon as possible? I should be immensely obliged to you. . . . Yes, it *is* urgent—very urgent, in fact. . . . Thank you—that's excellent."

The Chief put down the telephone, looked across to me.

"Coming at once. Oglethorpe knows me well enough to know that when I say 'urgent,' it means urgent. Now I hope we shall learn something."

Perhaps ten quiet minutes elapsed—ten minutes in which Q. Q. after leaning back thoughtfully in his chair for a moment or two, bent forward to his desk and wrote rapidly a long single column of words on a sheet of paper —and then Mr. Oglethorpe was announced.

He came into the room, a thin, worried-looking man of about forty-five years of age, clean-shaven, a little bald, conventionally the higher grade civil servant in his morning-coat, dark trousers, and the silk hat courteously doffed as he entered, conventionally the civil servant, too, in his precise, somewhat pedantic manner. The Chief shook hands with him like an old acquaintance, indicated the chair close to his desk. Mr. Oglethorpe seated himself.

"You want to see me about this terrible business in the office, I suppose, Mr. Quayne?" he said.

"Exactly," Q. Q. smiled at him.

"I have worked with Arbuthnot for twenty years—and I should never have dreamed that he was the man to commit suicide!" exclaimed Mr. Oglethorpe, in a tone of genuine horror at the memory.

Q. Q. continued to smile as he looked straight at his visitor, but there was no humor in that smile.

"Perhaps he did not commit suicide, Mr. Oglethorpe," he said quietly.

Mr. Oglethorpe jumped in his chair.

"What? Did not commit suicide? What on earth do you mean, Mr. Quayne? It must have been suicide—why, I was in the room a fraction of a minute after his revolver went off—I heard it as I passed along the corridor. It couldn't—how could it?—have been anything else than

suicide, incredible though it seems!" Mr. Oglethorpe was a picture of puzzled bewilderment—the implication in Q. Q.'s words was plain enough.

"Well, Mr. Oglethorpe," the Chief said in his smoothest tones, "there *is* a little doubt about it—for reasons which I will not go into. Will you just tell me all you know of the tragedy?"

Mr. Oglethorpe told his story, quite clearly and definitely, just as we had heard it already from Sebright. He was coming along the corridor from another department at ten past twelve when he heard the shot. He had rushed into the room. Arbuthnot was there alone, crumpled in his chair, a wound in the right side of his head. Horrified, he had dashed off to give the alarm. Yes—of course, he knew the cupboard in Arbuthnot's room—he could not say whether the door of it was open or shut—he hadn't given a thought to it. He had seen no one in the corridor, before or after the tragedy.

Q. Q. nodded gravely as he finished.

"Well, Mr. Oglethorpe, there is a possibility—I don't want to enlarge upon it—that Arbuthnot was murdered by one of the clerks in his own department."

"Impossible!" Mr. Oglethorpe was emphatic, all his instincts outraged. "It is a monstrously absurd suggestion, Mr. Quayne, one that—as the temporary acting head of the department and in view of the plain facts—I cannot but resent!"

"Nevertheless, Mr. Oglethorpe, it is a suggestion that has been made—and one that I am bound to probe. You would of course do all you could to assist in finding poor Arbuthnot's murderer—assuming that he *was* murdered?"

"Of course I should—though, I repeat, I can't for a moment believe it. What do you require of me?"

"I want to submit the six confidential clerks in your department to a little psychological test. It is one which—if I can trust the experience of the Viennese police, and sundry little efforts of my own—can scarcely fail in such circumstances. You have heard of the word-association method?"

"Something to do with psycho-analysis, isn't it? Sheer quackery, all of it, in my opinion." Mr. Oglethorpe let it be seen that he was old-fashioned and proud of it.

"Precisely," Q. Q. concurred, with a smile. "It is a method much used by psycho-analysts. I put a word to you. You answer as quickly as possible with the first word that rises in your mind in association. I measure the time-interval, in each case, between my question and your answer. In my list of words are one or two which have a direct bearing upon the case. When those words are put to the concealed criminal, he instantly recognizes their danger and instinctively—no matter what his command of himself—hesitates for a safe word to give in answer. It is quite automatic on his part. And accordingly, to those keywords his time-interval of association will show as appreciably longer than his average. . . . Now, I want you to have the goodness to send your clerks across to me, one by one, this afternoon, Mr. Oglethorpe—and since I want to get as wide a basis as possible for my averages, I should be very glad if you would commence with yourself now."

"I haven't the slightest faith in any of this psycho-analytic charlatanry," said Mr. Oglethorpe, with a superior note of condescending disdain in his voice, "but if you think it will help you, go ahead by all means. Fire away—I'm ready."

Q. Q. drew his sheet of paper in front of him, sat with pencil-point poised.

*"Bread!"* he said, and his pencil-point began to dot across the paper.

*"Butter!"* answered Mr. Oglethorpe promptly. Q. Q. stopped dotting at his first syllable, scribbled the word rapidly.

*"Sea!"*—dot-dot.

*"Ship!"*

*"Horse!"*—dot-dot.

*"Cart!"*

*"House!"*—dot-dot-dot.

*"Room!"*

*"Desk!"*—dot-dot-dot-dot.
*"Chair!"*
*"Table!"*—dot-dot-dot.
*"Cloth!"*
*"Cupboard!"*—dot-dot-dot.
*"Bone!"* Mr. Oglethorpe gave the answer, an obvious nursery-rhyme memory, almost desperately. The strain of keeping his brain alert he evidently found more difficult than he had anticipated. Q. Q. scribbled down each answer as it was given.
*"Carpet!"*—dot-dot.
*"Floor!"*

And so on through a list of about fifty words where, at intervals, I remarked only *code, revolver* and *murder* as specially significant.

When he had got to the end, Q. Q. looked up with his quiet smile.

"Thank you, Mr. Oglethorpe," he said. It was impossible to deduce whether or not he had detected any grounds for suspicion in that rapid quasi-schoolchild examination. "I am much obliged by your complaisance. And now will you carry it to the length of sending along your clerks, one by one, in order, let us say, of their seniority?"

Mr. Oglethorpe rose from his chair.

"Very well, Mr. Quayne. However unfounded I may and do consider your suspicions to be, it is my duty to help you probe them. But I'm quite sure you'll find in the end that poor Arbuthnot committed suicide."

"Perhaps, Mr. Oglethorpe." Q. Q. smiled at him. "But I should all the same like to try my little test on your other clerks."

Mr. Oglethorpe departed. Q. Q. did not address a word to me in the interval while we waited for the appearance of the next clerk from Arbuthnot's office. I busied myself on the routine task before me. Q. Q. leaned back in his chair, finger-tips together, frowning in a concentration of thought beyond my guesses.

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan was announced. He was a younger

man than Mr. Oglethorpe, struck a more modern note of smartly tailored, keen-edged efficiency. The little dark mustache on his good-looking face was neatly trimmed; his monocle gave him a touch of aristocratic differentiation from the usual office-worn type; his manner had the self-confident ease produced by the best of public-schools and a university. He smiled affably—with, however, a Foreign Office consciousness of personal dignity—as he approached the Chief.

"Oglethorpe tells me you want to see me about poor Arbuthnot's death, Mr. Quayne." He sank easily and comfortably into the chair Q. Q. indicated to him. "Anything I can do, of course—" He made a gesture of perfect readiness to oblige. "But I'm afraid that's not much."

Q. Q.'s quiet eyes were summing him up.

"So I understand. You were at lunch, I believe, when the tragedy occurred?"

"Yes. I knew nothing about it until I returned and the Scotland Yard fellow told me. It was a shock to me, of course, as it was to everyone else. Poor old fellow! One would never have suspected a suicidal streak in him—some private worry, perhaps."

Q. Q. caressed his chin.

"Did Mr. Oglethorpe tell you precisely why I wanted to see you, Mr. Vaughan?"

"No. He merely said that you wished to talk to me on the matter."

Q. Q. nodded.

"Then I will tell you, Mr. Vaughan—and perhaps it would be as well if you regarded it as in confidence. There is reason to suspect that Mr. Arbuthnot did not commit suicide—but that he was shot by one of the clerks in his personal department—a clerk who had an urgent motive to suppress him promptly."

His eyes were fixed on Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan as he spoke, but Mr. Vaughan manifested only the startled vivification of interest normal in such circumstances.

"You mean—*murdered?*" he gasped.

"I mean murdered." The Chief was impressively specific.

"But—my dear sir!" Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan was obviously much perturbed. "It seems to me fantastic—Oglethorpe almost saw him shoot himself—he was in the room a moment later—before any murderer could have escaped!" He paused for a look of utter incredulity at Q. Q. "What grounds have you for such a wildly improbable theory? Who could possibly have shot Arbuthnot? Unless Oglethorpe did it himself—which is grotesquely absurd!"

"That is what we are going to try and find out, Mr. Vaughan," replied the Chief quietly. "I'm sure I can call upon you to give me any assistance in your power?"

"Certainly—certainly," said Mr. Vaughan, "of course! But what do you want me to do?"

"I'll explain." And Q. Q. explained to him, precisely as he had explained to Mr. Oglethorpe, the psychological test he proposed to apply to the six clerks. Mr. Vaughan accepted it unhesitatingly. "Of course, there must be no exceptions," he said.

Once more Q. Q. pronounced his list of words, dotted down the time-interval before the associated word came in answer. Mr. Vaughan replied to all with—so far as I could tell—an equally prompt rapidity. He was plainly a quick-brained, highly intelligent fellow.

"Thank you, Mr. Vaughan," said Q. Q. when he had finished—and again it was impossible for me to guess, through his quiet normality of tone and feature, whether or not he had discovered the clue he sought for. "And now perhaps you will be good enough to send across the others in order of their seniority. It is unnecessary," he added with a smile, "to tell them of the purpose for which I require them."

Three more clerks followed in due course and succession—Mr. Wainwright, Mr. Turner and Mr. Billmore. All three of them were most improbable murderers, for all three—Q. Q. checked their answers one against the other—had been in their office all the morning, had not

left it on any pretext until Mr. Oglethorpe had rushed in with the news of Arbuthnot's suicide. Nevertheless all three of them submitted to the test—and Q. Q. remained quietly smiling and inscrutable as they were successively dismissed.

The next—and last—to present himself was the junior, Mr. Johnson, a tall, nervous but pleasant-looking lad, scarcely in his twenties.

"Sit down, Mr. Johnson," said Q. Q., smiling at him and indicating the chair in which Johnson's predecessors had sat. "You were in the Registry at the time the tragedy occurred this morning?"

"Yes sir." The boy submitted easily to the quiet authority which emanated from Q. Q.'s personality. "I was searching for a file that had been mislaid."

"Between what times—precisely?"

"It was a little before ten to twelve when I left my room, sir. I returned at twenty minutes past." The lad was obviously nervous. He moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue before he spoke.

"So from ten to twelve to nearly twenty past you were in the Registry?"

"Yes sir."

Q. Q. looked at him penetratingly from under his heavy gray eyebrows.

"Very well. It is necessary for me to check all the statements I receive. I will just ring up the Registry and get them to confirm those times." He reached for the telephone.

"Don't do that, sir!" The lad had halfsprung from his chair.

"Why?"

"I did not tell you the truth, sir." I saw perspiration on the boy's brow; once more his tongue moistened his lips. He turned away his eyes from Q. Q.'s piercing scrutiny.

"Then please tell me the truth now!"

"Yes sir. I—I did not go straight to the Registry. I slipped out of the building."

"Out of the building? Why?"

"To send a telegram—at the post office across the road in Parliament Street."

"To whom did you send that telegram?"

"I—I'd rather not say, sir."

Q. Q. frowned. I felt suddenly sorry for that lad, horrifyingly suspicious though were the circumstances that so suddenly gathered about him.

"Johnson!" The Chief's voice was sharply stern—a voice it was impossible not to obey. "You will tell me at once to whom you sent that telegram!"

The lad hesitated miserably. I saw his hands clench and unclench themselves, his face go white.

"It was to a money-lender, sir," he burst out after a moment when his voice seemed to have refused to function.

"A money-lender?"

"Yes—yes sir. I—I wanted to keep it a secret. He was threatening to denounce me to my chiefs if I did not pay today—you know what that would have meant, sir?" The boy spoke hurriedly now, imploringly. "I had written to my sister, telling her all about it. At a quarter to twelve I received a telegram from her—saying she would help me. Here it is, sir." The lad fished out a crumpled telegram from his pocket, held it out to Q. Q., who took it without removing his eyes from the soul under their scrutiny. "I dashed across to the post office to send a telegram to him telling him that my sister was paying—to take no action." The lad stopped breathlessly, his eyes miserably on Q. Q.'s inscrutable face.

The Chief glanced at the telegram.

"This is not very explicit," he said. "It merely says, 'All right, Vera.' That might mean anything. . . . Do you grasp the point of this questioning, Johnson?"

"No—no sir," the lad stuttered. "I—I don't think I do."

"The point is that Mr. Arbuthnot was murdered in his room at ten minutes past twelve. On your story, you left

the building at ten minutes before the hour. Where were you at ten minutes past?"

"In the post office, sir."

"From ten minutes to the hour to ten minutes past? Twenty minutes?"

"I had to wait in a queue, sir."

"And then you returned to the Registry?"

"Yes sir. I took the file I said I wanted, and went back to my room. It was then I first heard the news about poor Mr. Arbuthnot, sir."

"H'm! Well, the post-office records will prove the truth of your statements. Your telegram will note the time it was handed in. You say that was ten past?"

"No sir. The telegram was handed in at a quarter past. At ten past I was still waiting in the queue."

"Quarter past? How long, Johnson, did it actually take you to run down from the corridor where your room is situated, to the post office?"

"Under two minutes, sir."

"And you are sure—*quite sure*—that it was at ten minutes to the hour—and not just after ten minutes *past*—that you ran to the post office?" The implication in that question was terribly obvious.

"Yes sir."

"Well, I am going to test the truth of your story. Now listen to me—"

Again the Chief explained the method he was going to employ. "To answer is the only way of clearing yourself from the suspicion that now rests upon you," he said.

"Yes sir. But—believe me, sir—I know nothing about poor Mr. Arbuthnot's death—nothing—I swear to you, sir!" The lad was evidently horribly alarmed. "I was in the post office at the time, sir!"

Q. Q.'s eyes probed him.

"Calm yourself, Mr. Johnson. . . . And concentrate your mind on putting, as rapidly as possible, an associated word to the word I shall give you."

The boy gulped.

*"Bread!"*—dot-dot-dot.

*"Butter!"* He forced himself to the strain of an answer, hit the natural association which all his predecessors had given.

*"Sea!"*—dot-dot.

*"Shore!"*

*"Horse!"*—dot-dot-dot-dot.

*"Hoof!"*

Q. Q. took him right through the list, dotting the intervals of his hesitations, scribbling down his replies. The lad answered irregularly, spasmodically, a perspiration of distress upon his forehead, a look of terror in the eyes that stared as though hypnotized at Q. Q. It was all he could do, evidently, to keep his mind to the focus of what was required of him, and some of his associations were wildly wide—desperately clutched at in his anxiety to give a reply not too long delayed.

The Chief finished his inquisition, examined the paper with the irregular rows of dots, the final answers, compared them with the records of the others.

"H'm!" he grunted, his face inscrutable.

The lad sat staring at him, his hands twitching, scarcely daring—it would seem—to breathe.

The telephone bell rang sharply. Q. Q. took up the instrument.

"Hello? . . . Yes—Quayne speaking. . . . Who's that? . . . Oh, Sebright? . . . What? You've got your man? . . . Who is it? . . . Oglethorpe?" Q. Q. smiled, grimly. "Beware of those clear cases, Sebright. They're often only the mirror of your own ideas. I'm afraid you'll have to release Oglethorpe—with apologies. . . . Yes. *Why?* Because I happen to have caught the man, and it isn't Oglethorpe. I'll hand him over to you presently. . . . By the way, Sebright, where are you ringing up from? . . . The F. O.? Good! Would you mind asking Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan to step round here again as soon as possible? I've something important to speak to him about. . . . Thanks." Q. Q. put back the receiver.

Young Johnson had sprung to his feet, stood quivering

while Q. Q. talked. I watched him narrowly, my muscles tense to leap on him should he offer a sudden violence. There was a wild look in his frightened eyes.

"I—I didn't do it, sir!" he stammered.

The Chief smiled at him.

"I know you didn't," he said.

The boy stared, bewildered.

"Then—then—why have you asked Mr. Vaughan to come here, sir? You're not going to—to tell him about that money-lender?" There was a new and scarcely less acute alarm in his face. "For God's sake, don't, sir! Mr. Vaughan would report me at once!"

The Chief smiled again, more kindly.

"Not that, either. This experience in dealing with money-lenders will suffice you for a lifetime, I trust. That's all I have to say to you, Mr. Johnson." He nodded in dismissal.

Young Johnson still could not quite grasp the situation.

"You mean—you don't want me any more, sir?"

"No. And if you should meet Mr. Vaughan on your way back to your office, say nothing to him. Good afternoon."

Q. Q. turned back to those enigmatic papers which held a secret that tantalized my curiosity to a sudden fever-pitch.

"Goo-good-afternoon, sir!" The lad went out of that room, haunted for him by a dreadful ordeal, with a gladly eager haste that was almost a flight.

When he had gone, I looked across to the Chief.

"You've got your man, sir?"

Q. Q. glanced up at me, his face grimly satisfied in its expression.

"Yes."

"It looked bad for young Johnson, sir—and he seemed to stumble terribly when you applied your test." I was, of course, fishing, but it had in fact seemed to me more than once that the lad must be betraying himself, so desperate were his hesitations.

"Pooh! His time-intervals were of course wildly er-

ratic—what one would expect from the strain he was undergoing—but on the key-words he was no more erratic than elsewhere. Now, this record"—he held up another sheet of paper—"is curiously regular—the shortest intervals of any—till we come to those same vital words. And then there is a sudden seventy-five- to a hundred-per-cent increase—almost imperceptible while he spoke, but evident enough here. Moreover—automatically in his first quickness he gave the curious association *'hide'* to the word *'cupboard'*—the only one to do so; after that, recognizing his slip, he was on his guard—a little too much on his guard." He chuckled with satisfaction. "That's the man, Mr. Creighton!"

"Which man, sir?"

"Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan."

"D'Arcy Vaughan!" I echoed the name in astonishment. Mr. Vaughan had seemed to me the most normal of any of those six men who had sat in that chair—his answers unvarying in their glib rapidity. "And—you're going to arrest him, sir? Directly he comes in?" I thrilled with the sense of imminent crisis.

"Not quite as soon as that, Mr. Creighton. What I have here is evidence enough for myself. But it is not legal evidence. I'm going to get that legal evidence. I'm going to get a signed confession." His tone was curt with a confidence I did not share.

"D'Arcy Vaughan—if he's the man, sir—doesn't seem to me the sort of fellow to give confessions easily," I ventured. "He must have immense nerve to behave as he did in this office."

"He has—a phenomenal nerve. But even the strongest nerves can be broken down, Mr. Creighton." Q. Q. leaned back in his chair and smiled at me with a grim blandness. "You've heard of the third degree, I suppose? It usually implies some physical pain to the prisoner under examination. We're a little too civilized for that. I'm going to put Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan through what we may call the fourth degree—considerably more subtle and quite as efficacious."

"I don't understand, sir. Do I come in on this?"

"You, Mr. Creighton, will merely quietly get up and lock that door behind Mr. Vaughan when he enters, and then you will return to your desk, and get on with your work in absolute silence. You will not utter a word, unless I speak to you."

"Very good, sir." I was utterly baffled to guess what scheme Q. Q. had in his mind, but it was with an intense impatience that I watched the minute-hand slip round the clock. It was close on five. Perhaps Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan would after all smell a rat—not come? A feverish anxiety for his appearance mounted in me, obscured the petty routine task on which I was engaged.

The office telephone-bell rang, startling me in the tension of my nerves. The Chief answered it.

"Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan? Show him in, please." From his tone, he might have been admitting the most casual of visitors, but he smiled—a smile of intimate satisfaction —at me as he put back the receiver.

The door opened. Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan, sprucely elegant, his monocle in place, his good-looking features happily serene, entered the room. I rose, went unobtrusively behind him, locked the door, returned to my place. Mr. Vaughan advanced toward Q. Q.

"Well, Mr. Quayne," he said, in a voice that struck me as oddly cheerful for a man whose office had been the scene of such tragic events, "you've heard what's happened in this terrible business? They've arrested Oglethorpe—poor, queer old Oglethorpe! I would never have believed it possible, but Scotland Yard seems quite certain —and it knows its business, I suppose. Awful! Terrible —terrible!"

"Yes, I had heard," replied Q. Q. coolly.

Mr. Vaughan sat down in the chair, carefully deposited his glossy silk hat on a corner of Q. Q.'s desk, and casually crossed one nicely creased trouser-leg over the other. If he was indeed the man, I could not but admire his perfect aplomb.

"And now, Mr. Quayne," he said, "before we come to whatever you want to see me about, there's a little thing I'm curious to know. Did the results of your pyscho-analytic test by any chance coincide with those of the police?"

Q. Q. leaned back in his chair, tapped his finger-tips together.

"No," he replied, "they did not."

Mr. Vaughan smiled.

"Ah?" His tone politely indicated a previous skepticism that was now justified. "I trust you psycho-analysts will have the grace to acknowledge at least one failure of your magic methods."

Q. Q. continued to tap his finger-tips together as he smiled blandly.

"It was not a failure," he said.

"Not a failure? But—I do not understand—I thought you said—" Mr. Vaughan was all courtesy, a rather malicious courtesy, perhaps, in a gestured sketch of baffled comprehension. He smiled frankly, pleasantly, at his interlocutor.

"It was not a failure." Q. Q. had spoken these words in the quietest, most dulcet of his tones. He rose from his chair, stood erect, spoke in a voice that to me seemed like a thunderclap in its sudden stern vehemence. *"Own up, Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan!* You're caught!"

The man had sprung up from his chair also in an indignation that, whether real or simulated, was impressive in its apparent authenticity.

"What do you mean?" His voice quivered, but it was with anger. "What are you trying to suggest?"

"I am suggesting, Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan,"—Q. Q.'s tone was sharply explicit—"that you are a spy in your own department, that you were betraying official secrets, that Mr. Arbuthnot detected you, called you into his room this morning as you passed on your way to lunch and taxed you with it, that he had the imprudence, perhaps, to threaten you—possibly in self-defense—with his revolver during the altercation, that you seized that re-

volver and shot him dead, that hearing some one come to the door, you then sprang into the clothes-cupboard and dodged out again directly the coast was clear. Is that definite enough for you?"

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan looked as though he were going to strike his accuser in the face. I saw his fists clench, the lips go blanched under his little dark mustache. He mastered himself with an effort.

"Mr. Quayne, if you were a younger man, I would thrash you for this outrageous imputation!" he gasped in his wrath. "As it is, you have chosen to utter this monstrous slander before a witness." He jerked his hand in my direction. "You shall hear from my solicitors!" He strode toward the door.

Fascinated, I watched him as he reached it, tugged at the handle, twisted it in vain. Then he swung round again, his face ablaze with fury.

"Open that door at once!" he cried. "What does this mean?"

"It means, Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan," said Q. Q. in his most coldly level tones, "that you are a prisoner in this room until such time as you dictate and sign your confession."

The man glared at him, livid. He could scarcely speak in the rage which choked him.

"This is an outrage—a monstrous outrage! You dare, Mr. Quayne—*you dare* to subject a civil servant of my standing to this gross indignity! To illegal detention! Have a care, Mr. Quayne! You are laying yourself open to an action which I will fight through court after court till I ruin you!"

Q. Q. smiled grimly.

"You may have another case to fight in the courts before that, Mr. Vaughan. It is useless to wrestle with that door. You cannot open it."

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan had once more switched round to the door, was tugging at it, twisting at the handle in an almost maniacal fury of anger. He faced round again to Q. Q.

"Open it, I say! Open it," he choked, "or—"

"Or nothing, Mr. Vaughan." Q. Q. was smoothly unruffled. "You will do nothing. You will merely in due course, when you are tired of raging at that door, sit down in that chair and dictate your confession." With which, Q. Q. himself calmly resumed his seat, picked up a paper on his desk and apparently gave it his undivided cool attention.

Mr. Vaughan stared at him for a moment, the muscles of his face twitching, his eyes murderous if ever a man's were—and then he strode straight across to me.

*"You!"* The violence in his voice startled me, half-prepared for it though I was. "Open that door at once —or I charge you as an accomplice in this felony! *Felony* —you understand! Penal servitude!" Ugly menace looked out of him. I gripped myself, remembered Q. Q.'s orders, remained stolidly silent, bent over my work again. *"Do you hear?"* My shoulder was violently shaken. "Open that door, or—" He had no threat vicious enough for his anger.

I glanced at him, as coolly as I could,—obviously my cue was to imitate the Chief, at that moment quite unperturbed, apparently engrossed in the perusal of some document,—saw the ferocity in his glare, saw his fingers working—itching for a weapon which, thank Heaven, he did not possess—and remained dumb. Not only dumb, but, as well as I could feign it, deaf! Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan, I could see in the instant before my eyes went down to my work again, could have screamed blasphemies in the extremity of his exasperation. The uncanny completeness of our silence sent a gleam of fright into his eyes. Then once more they went impotently murderous. I guessed, even as with an effort of self-command I turned my gaze away from him, that he was speculating whether he would have a chance in a hand-to-hand mix-up with the pair of us.

Apparently he decided that he would not. I felt him remove his presence from over me, glanced up discreetly

to see him once more in the center of the room, facing the Chief.

"Mr. Quayne!" He controlled his voice to a harsh similitude of normality. "Do you mean that you have the insane intention of keeping me a prisoner in this room until I sign a confession of a murder of which I know nothing?"

Q. Q. raised his eyes to him, as though only just again aware of his presence.

"You are begging the question, Mr. Vaughan," he said quietly, turning over a page of his papers while he spoke. "I have all the relevant information. I require only your confession. And it is certainly my intention to keep you here till I get it."

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan achieved a short scornful laugh.

"Very well," he said. "We shall see who can wait longest." He flung himself into the chair, sat tapping with his foot upon the floor. "You yourselves cannot sit forever in this room. And when we leave it, Mr. Quayne, believe me, you shall rue this outrage!"

Mr. Quayne merely turned over another page of the document he was perusing with such concentrated attention.

His victim glared at him, opened his cigarette-case,—I noticed, maliciously, that it contained only one cigarette,—struck a match, commenced to smoke. The silence of that room, high above the neighboring housetops, was like the grave. It perpetuated itself, continued until even I felt it a strain upon my nerves. The only sound was the deep breathing of that man in the chair adjacent to Q. Q.'s desk. Unobtrusively I kept a sharp eye upon him, alert to interpose in that sudden panther-spring I felt to be imminent. But none came. Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan sat immobile, his lips pressed tight, smoking with the tiniest of puffs, evidently—I could sympathize with him—trying to economize that one and only cigarette to the last possible moment. And the silence in that room continued, persisted till it seemed to ring in my ears.

I glanced at the clock-hand. It marked half-past five.

Mr. Vaughan stirred.

"Mr. Quayne!"

Q. Q. lifted an eyebrow at him.

"How long is this madness to continue?"

"Until I get your confession." Q. Q.'s tone was quietly acceptive of the situation, was, without the faintest impatience, coolly confident of the final result.

"Pshaw!" The man jumped up from his chair again, paced up and down the room in febrile exasperation. Q. Q. had once more reverted to the perusal of his documents, did not so much as glance at him. The victim strode once more across to me, evidently on the impulse to make another trial of my subordinate resolution. I forced myself to remain unperceptive of his presence. I could feel the glare of his eyes upon me as I bent my own down to my work, could feel him hesitate over the utility of the appeal—or of the threat. He renounced either. I heard his soft footfalls on the carpet recede away to the center of the room, heard them go toward Q. Q.'s desk, heard the sudden creak of his chair as he flung himself down into it again.

When, discreetly, I glanced up, I saw him sitting there, his fingers drumming on his knee, the cigarette short between his lips glowing in a momentary forgetfulness of economy.

The silence continued. The ticking of the clock became insistent, an obsession to the ear. Its hands slipped round —six o'clock—a quarter past. Outside, the light began to die out of the sky. Within the room there were already shadows. Long ago Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan had got to the end of his smoke. For what seemed an age he had sat like a statue, utterly motionless. What was he thinking, I wondered. And still the silence remained unbroken.

It was shattered suddenly.

"Quayne!" The man paused, waiting for a movement of Q. Q.'s head that did not occur. "I don't know how long this farce is going on—but I'll count it as mitigation if you'll give me a cigarette."

But Mr. Quayne had apparently lost the sense of

hearing. He merely picked another from the pile of documents at his hand.

Once more the room relapsed into silence—into a silence that grew haunted, terrifying, vibrant with mysterious unuttered menace as the twilight deepened in the room—a silence that *rang* and yet was soundless. A sudden mutter from the man in the chair seemed only to intensify it. How long indeed was this going on? I myself grew unnerved with the strain, felt the impulse to use my voice—to break this uncanny hush—rise up in me, almost irresistible. Had I been sitting there with the guilt of murder on my conscience, I could not have refrained from shouting it aloud to get relief at any cost from this intolerable ordeal of soundlessness wherein the stark fundamental outlines of one's soul seemed automatically to emerge. I should have screamed that guilt, in hysteria, long ago. But still the man I could half-see in the gloom sat motionless and silent in his chair. Still, Q. Q. remained, holding up a document to get the last of the light, seemingly oblivious of his presence. For myself, I had given up even the pretense of work. I sat, gripped in that dead hush, and waited—waited—while the shadows thickened.

Suddenly I heard a sound—the faintest little whir; and then—

*"He shall confess, Mr. Quayne—I am determined on it!"*

The voice came out of the gloom, silent, deep-toned, vibrant with authority—the voice of the murdered Arbuthnot! Even to me, who could an instant later guess its source, it came with a shock to my nerves, uncanny from the formless shadows of the room. To the man in the chair, it came with the full force of a supernatural presence—sternly inexorable in a ghostly omnipotence. He sprang to his feet, stood quivering.

"What was that? Quayne, did you hear that? *Arbuthnot's voice!* I—I—no—it couldn't be—couldn't be! Quayne,"—his voice was strained with terror,—"let me out of this! I'm going mad! I can't stand it any longer!"

Q. Q. apparently did not hear him. He did not move. One hand still held the document up to the last glimmer of outside light; the other was out of sight beneath his desk. Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan gasped. Once more he turned toward me, and I saw his two hands go slowly, quiveringly, up toward his head as he stood silhouetted against the window. The man was gripped in a paroxysm of terror at those suddenly vocal shadows all around him—*at himself.*

"No," I heard him whisper to himself, "no! It couldn't have been! It couldn't have been!"

And then once more came that solemn, deep-toned, authoritative voice:

*"He shall confess, Mr. Quayne—I am determined on it!"*

A choked scream broke from the tortured wretch.

"No—no! Quiet, Arbuthnot! *Quiet—for God's sake!* I —can't bear it! I—I'll tell—I'll confess! I'll confess! Quayne—*Quayne!"* His voice came almost in a shriek from the shadows which hid his face. "I'll confess—I'll confess! Take it down—I'll confess!"

Q. Q. laid down his papers.

"Take down what Mr. Vaughan dictates, Mr. Creighton," he said, quietly. "Resume your chair, Mr. Vaughan." He touched the switch by his desk, and the room was suddenly flooded with light.

Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan, no longer the spruce, well-groomed civil servant, but a haggard, wild-eyed wretch,— I was startled at the havoc the ordeal had made in him,— obeyed like a creature drained of volition, dropped heavily into his chair. I took up my pen and wrote as, quaveringly, gaspingly, the utterly unnerved, broken man began his confession. It was a confession of official secrets betrayed, sent by agony-column code-messages to a great foreign commercial organization to which they were of immense utility, of—precisely as Q. Q. had divined—Arbuthnot's having stopped him as he went along the corridor to his lunch, taxed him with it, of a wild alarm, a determination to suppress this danger at once, of the beginnings of a

murderous struggle in which Arbuthnot had snatched the revolver from his drawer, of another snatch at that revolver which had seized it, of the sudden shot, of Oglethorpe at the door, of a spring into the clothes-cupboard, and a moment later—when Oglethorpe had dashed out again, horrified at the discovery—a quick rush along the corridor, unobserved, to lunch.

Q. Q. listened, inscrutable, to the end.

"Now sign, Mr. Vaughan," he said in his quiet level voice.

The man got up from his chair, moved toward my desk —stopped suddenly.

"No!" he cried. Obviously he made a great effort to pull himself together, to resume command of himself, seemed to succeed. "No! I won't sign!" He laughed like a maniac. "It's only your word against mine—both of you—and I'll swear it's a fabrication—a tissue of lies! I'm not going to sign away my life because you played a trick on me! How you did it, I don't know—but trick I'm sure it was!"

He stood glowering defiance at Q. Q.

"As you like, Mr. Vaughan," said the Chief quietly. "It makes really no difference whether you sign or not. Just listen a moment!" He bent forward, touched something on his desk. "Another little trick, Mr. Vaughan." He smiled pleasantly.

To my own astonishment there issued into the room, startlingly lifelike, Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan's voice in a recapitulated, word-for-word recital of his crime. The first few sentences of it were sufficient—Mr. D'Arcy Vaughan raised his hand. To his first amazement had succeeded a sudden bitterness of comprehension.

"That's enough," he said. "I don't want to hear it over again." He controlled his voice to a cynical appreciation. "A dictaphone, of course?"

"A double-barreled one, Mr. Vaughan," said the Chief, still pleasantly. "With a blank record waiting for you."

Vaughan glared at Q. Q. in a sudden last flash of ferocity. "Curse you and your infernal cunning tricks!" he said. "All right—I may as well sign." He came across

to my desk, scrawled a signature at the foot of the paper I presented to him, turned again with a snarl to the Chief. "Now what are you going to do?"

Q. Q. smiled grimly, took off the telephone receiver, asked for a number.

"Sebright? . . . Ah, Quayne speaking. Just come round here, will you? . . . I've got that man for you. Yes—signed confession. He's only waiting for you."

# EDWIN BAIRD

## THE MYSTERY OF THE LOCKED DOOR

CALVIN MCCREADY, chief of police at Glenwood, unhooked his telephone receiver.

"Hello!" said he. "What's wanted?"

A frightened feminine voice shrilled excitedly in his ear:

"Is this the police station? . . . Then come out here quick! We've been robbed! Burglars broke in last night. I just discovered it. They broke in through the pantry window. Stole all our silver plate, and broke open a cedar chest, where I kept the linen, and upset the house——"

The breathless torrent of words was interrupted at this point by Chief McCready:

"If you don't mind tellin' me, ma'm, I'd like for to know whose house you're talkin' about."

"This is Amos Caldwell's house," screamed the sharp little voice. "Do hurry! It's two miles north of town, on Glenview Road——"

"I know where it is," said the chief, again interrupting her. "But who's this talkin'?"

"I'm Mr. Caldwell's housekeeper—Mrs. Harriet Farson. If you'll only hurry——"

"I'll start right away," he promised, and dropped the receiver in its hook, took his hat and coat from a peg near the desk, lit a five-cent cigar, and sauntered to the rear of the village lockup, where his flivver was parked. Presently he was journeying north in Glenview Road, through the crisp autumnal morning, toward the country estate of Amos Caldwell, retired millionaire. Chief of Police McCready—who also, of course, was the entire police force of Glenwood—was familiar with the eccentricities of "old

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man" Caldwell; and he was wondering now why burglars should want to enter his home, and, having entered, what they would find worth stealing.

After his wife's death Caldwell had sold his luxurious home in Chicago and made his permanent abode in this old-fashioned country place, once used by his family only as a summer residence; and here, for all his wealth, he lived in the utmost frugality. Of late years he had become known among the villagers as a "cracked" old miser and recluse. He never visited his neighbors, rarely if ever received a caller, had no intercourse with the outside world, and seldom saw anybody except his housekeeper and gardener.

When Chief McCready turned into the graveled driveway, which wound upward between two rows of hard maples to a huge brick mansion on a knoll, he saw these two persons awaiting him on the front veranda.

"I was never so upset in my life!" cried the woman, hurrying nervously down the steps to meet him. "I do hope you can catch those burglars. They might have murdered me! I never dreamed the house had been robbed till I came downstairs this morning, about seven o'clock, just before I telephoned you, and found everything topsy-turvy, sideboard drawers open and things scattered about helter-skelter. But come inside and I'll show you."

In a garrulous flutter, she preceded him into a wide reception-hall, quite bare of furniture or ornamentation, save for an old broken chair and a threadbare rug.

"These lower rooms," she rambled on, entering a doorway to the left, "haven't been used since Mrs. Caldwell died, twenty years ago. They've never been opened, except when I cleaned and dusted. And now just look at 'em!" She made an exasperated gesture.

McCready, following her, beheld two high-ceilinged drawing-rooms and a dining-room beyond, which, in marked contrast to the hall, were furnished in splendor—the faded splendor of a bygone day. He remembered now that when Mrs. Caldwell was alive this house had been

noted as a gathering-place for the wealth and fashion of her time.

The decaying grandeur of the old-style room was now in wild disorder. Massive mahogany cabinets had been roughly opened and their contents scattered broadcast, costly oil paintings were ripped from their frames and piled on the floor, the dining-room buffet was plundered, the drawers pillaged, and a heavy escritoire and an upholstered couch were turned upside down.

Each piece of furniture, in fact, had been moved from its accustomed place and violently mistreated, and the floor of every room was strewn with all manner of things. McCready, picking his way through the wreckage, was puzzled. This senseless confusion and wanton destruction didn't suggest burglars to his mind. It suggested vandals.

He turned to the woman, whose tongue was still churning tirelessly, and cut in on her talkativeness:

"You say you knew nothin' about this till this morning? Didn't you hear any sounds in these rooms last night?"

"Nothing," she said firmly. "I sleep on the third floor, and I never knew what had happened till I came down this morn——"

"And *you,*" said McCready, turning to the gardener, who had silently followed them through the rooms, "didn't you hear anything, either?"

"He sleeps in the stable," exclaimed the housekeeper. "How could *he* hear anything——"

"How about it?" asked McCready, ignoring the woman and addressing the man. "Did you hear anything, or not?"

"I didn't hear nawthin'," grumbled the gardener, breaking his silence for the first time.

McCready surveyed the disordered furniture, recklessly scattered around him, and scratched his stubbled chin in perplexity. He was thinking that whoever moved this furniture must have made considerable noise.

"Where's Mr. Caldwell?" he asked the housekeeper.

"In his room upstairs, asleep. He never comes near these rooms; hasn't been in 'em for years and years—not

since Mrs. Caldwell died. When he sees what's happened here——"

"We'll wake 'im up and tell 'im," decided McCready, starting for the hall stairway.

"Not just yet! Please!" Her voice atremble with apprehension, she seized his arm entreatingly. "Don't wake him yet," she implored. "You see, he's awfully peculiar, full of strange notions and such. He holds these rooms sacred—keeps 'em locked up and never goes near them—and when he sees how they've been desecrated——"

"He's got to know *some* time," argued McCready. "He might as well know now."

"But I dread to tell him what's happened. You don't know him as I do! Besides, he never gets up till nine o'clock, and it's hardly eight. If we wake him up now——"

"I'll take the responsibility for that," said the chief. "Come on; show me his room."

He shook off her detaining hand, and, heedless of her expostulation, ascended to the upper hall, which, like the hall below, was destitute of adornment, denoting poverty rather than riches.

She followed him reluctantly, loquaciously remonstrating, and pointed to a door near the front end of the corridor.

"That's his room," she said, and in palpable agitation watched McCready knock on the panel.

Getting no response, he rapped more loudly and sharply called: "Hello in there! Wake up!"

Still no reply. He tried the doorknob. The door was locked. Finally, despite the housekeeper's vigorous objection, he stood on a chair and looked into the room through the transom window.

It was a small chamber, meagerly furnished, and on a shabby old couch-bed near a closed window lay Amos Caldwell, his back to the door, his fringe of white hair showing above the bed clothes. Again McCready called to him, fairly shouting his name, but the man on the bed never moved.

"There's something mighty strange here—" stepping down from the chair. "Have you got a key to this door?"

The housekeeper shook her head. "There's only one key," she told him—"the one Mr. Caldwell uses. He locks himself in every night."

"Then we'll have to break in," said McCready, and hurled his weight against the oaken panel.

After a few moments of this, he broke the lock and opened the door. He walked inside to the dilapidated couch and shook the shoulder of the man lying there. And then, all at once, he straightened up, with a sudden intake of breath. He saw now why Caldwell hadn't answered.

He turned and beckoned to the housekeeper, who stood in the doorway, her face white, eyes staring apprehensively.

"What's happened?" she asked in a nervous whisper. "Is anything the matter with him? Can't you wake him up?"

"No," said McCready, quietly. "Nobody can wake 'im up. Mr. Caldwell is dead."

Fifteen minutes later, or a little past eight o'clock on that autumnal morning, Thomas Caldwell, only son of Amos Caldwell, and the only surviving near relative, received a long-distance telephone call at his bachelor apartment in Chicago, from Chief McCready.

"Your father is dead," said the chief, "and I'm not sure whether he died a natural death, or was murdered. The circumstances look mighty mysterious. I've sent for the coroner, who'll soon tell us what killed 'im."

McCready then described in detail what had happened, from the moment he was notified of the burglary until he broke into the elder Caldwell's room.

"The thing that's puzzlin' me now," he concluded, "is how the burglars got in your father's bedroom—assumin' they *did* get in—because, when I found 'im, the door was locked on the inside and the window was closed and bolted. Of course, I don't know that they killed your father. There's no marks o' violence on his body, nothin'

to show he was murdered. But the coroner will clear that up. You'll be comin' out right away, I take it?"

"Yes, of course. There's a train leaving for Glenwood in thirty minutes. I'll come on that train."

Young Caldwell, stunned by the shock, was now emerging from his daze. He telephoned his office, hastily explained what had happened, then called a taxicab and hurried to the office of Herbert Barry, Sales Manager of the Fidelity Check Protector Company. Barry's skill as an amateur detective was equal to his ability in salesmanship—and he was recognized as one of the best salesmen in the business. Detective work was his only hobby, and he never missed a chance to indulge it.

"Grab your hat, Herbert. Important case. We've got to make a train in ten minutes. I'll explain on the way. Hurry!" . . . A frantic dash in the taxicab—and they caught the rear platform of the last coach of the Glenwood train as it moved from the railroad station.

An hour later, in a village hack, they drove to Thomas Caldwell's ancestral home, and were met at the front door by Chief McCready, Mrs. Farson, the housekeeper, and Otto Grusendorf, the gardener. To each of them the sales-manager detective was introduced merely as "Mr. Ennis," with no word to account for his presence here.

As he shook hands with them, his keen eyes noted their salient characteristics—thus: McCready, lantern-jawed; drooping black mustache; bushy eyebrows; dark brown eyes; lanky build; careless dress; commonsense; methodical mind. Mrs. Farson: angular; pointed chin; bony hands; prominent cheekbones; gray hair; excitable; quick-tempered; impulsive; over-talkative; age, fifty-odd. Grusendorf: thick; heavy-set; wide face; stolid eyes; leathery hands; phlegmatic; taciturn; age, fifty.

"The coroner's upstairs," McCready informed young Caldwell. "I guess you'll be wantin' to see 'im?"

"Yes; at once."

They found Coroner Felix Webb in the senior Cald-

well's bedroom, crawling about on hands and knees and diligently searching the floor.

"I'm looking for a hypodermic syringe," he explained, "that ought to be in this room. I've hunted everywhere, but can't seem to find it. Did you happen to see it, McCready?"

"No," said McCready, "and nobody else has been in this room. I guarded it myself till you come."

"Strange! It ought to be here, then. . . . I've made a post-mortem examination," added the coroner, turning to Tom Caldwell, "and I find that your father died from an over-dose of cocaine, hypodermically injected. The evidence indicates that his death was self-inflicted, but whether from suicidal intent, or accidentally——"

"It was neither!" blazed young Caldwell, flushing hotly. "My father was never addicted to drugs, and as for suicide —that, of course, is preposterous! If he died from poison, as you say, it was given to him by somebody else, and against his will."

Coroner Webb, disconcerted by this sudden upflare, said in a conciliatory tone: "The fact that the syringe can't be found *does* indicate, I admit, that death was homicidal; *but*—and here's the thing we can't overcome—if it *was* homicide, how did the murderer enter and leave this room? As you see, there is only one door and one window here; and when your father's body was found the window was bolted tight, and the door was also locked—*on the inside.*"

Tom gazed hopelessly around the room, and his eyes came to rest on the transom window. But it was quite obvious that no human being, save possibly a dwarf, could have entered that way. The opening was scarcely twelve inches wide.

Barry, who had been silently examining the chamber, seeing much and saying nothing, quietly interposed at this point:

"When you broke down the door," he asked McCready, "where did you find the key?"

"It was layin' just about here," said the chief, indicating

with his foot a spot near the threshold. "I musta jolted it out o' the lock."

Barry offered no comment, but spoke to the coroner:

"In what part of Mr. Caldwell's body was the hypodermic injection made?"

"On the left side, about two inches above the heart."

"Any other needle marks on his body?"

"None that I can find."

"Thank you." Then to young Caldwell: "Let's take a look at the rooms below."

The debris in these lower rooms possessed a potent fascination for Barry. With absorbed interest, he carefully inspected the broken furniture and demolished ornaments, devoting particular attention to the stuffed chairs and divans, which had been ripped open and disembowled as though in a spirit of willful destruction.

He spent upward of forty minutes here, searching through the wreckage; then he beckoned to Tom and walked outdoors.

"Have you any idea," he asked, when they were some distance from the house, "what your father had hidden in those first-floor rooms?"

"So far as I know," said Tom, "he had nothing hidden there. As a matter of fact, he never used those rooms at all. They've been sealed up for twenty years—ever since my mother's death."

Barry narrowed his gray eyes thoughtfully. "Then that gives us Problem One," he murmured, as one who thinks aloud.

"But what of my father's death?" demanded young Caldwell. "Surely that is far more important, and far more mystifying, than this sordid burglary?"

"No," disagreed Barry. "As I see it, the two dovetail. Solve one, and you've solved the other. There's no doubt in my mind that your father was murdered——"

"But how?" interrupted Tom. "How could the murderer leave the room and lock the door on the *inside?*"

"That puzzle," smiled Barry, "is childishly simple. The murderer opened the door, walked in, killed your father,

walked out, locked the door, and tossed the key over the transom."

"Well, by George. Why didn't *I* think of that? Of course that was what he did. At any rate, it *could* be done."

"It *was* done," declared Barry. "That your father did not kill himself is proved by what the coroner says. Only the most desperate drug addict will shoot dope near his heart. The beginner invariably chooses the forearm. Your father was not even a beginner, as is shown by the absence of scars on his body. Also, the fact that the hypodermic needle wasn't found in his room, and cannot be found now, explodes the theory of suicide. So much for that.

"The thing that is puzzling me now," he went on, "is the object of the raid on those first-floor rooms. What were the raiders looking for? Or what did they *think* they were looking for? When we've answered that . . . Oh, by the way," he suddenly asked, "this Mrs. Farson—how long has she been in your father's service?"

"At least twenty years," replied Tom. "I remember I was only a kid when she came. Nothing wrong with her, old man; I'm sure of that. She was inordinately devoted to my father; understood and humored all his whims. He trusted her implicitly."

"And the gardener, Grusendorf?"

"He's been here ten years or so. Always honest and faithful."

The young men strolled on beneath the elms which shaded the sloping lawn, in grave silence, each occupied with his thoughts. Presently Barry looked back at the house.

"I think they're getting ready for the inquest in there, so perhaps we'd better go back. It may shed some light on the thing."

The inquest, however, served only to darken the mystery. Mrs. Farson, the first witness, testified that she had gone to bed at her usual hour the night before (about ten o'clock), in her room at the rear of the third floor, had slept soundly through the night, and had come downstairs

about seven o'clock that morning—to find the house had been burglarized. In her voluble way, she told of calling the gardener, of notifying the police, and of the subsequent discovery that the master of the house was dead.

Her testimony was corroborated, in the main, by that of Grusendorf and Chief McCready. Nor could the questioning of Coroner Webb cause her to change a jot of it. The inquest was conducted in the front drawing-room, and during this interrogation the coroner, gesturing toward the surrounding disorder, said:

"It's evident, Mrs. Farson, that a lot of noise was made here last night. Are you positive you heard no sound whatever?"

"*Absolutely* positive," she declared emphatically. "If I'd heard anything I'd tell you."

"Your bedroom door was closed?"

"Closed and locked. I always lock it before I——"

"Do you know of any reason, Mrs. Farson, why anybody should want to kill Mr. Caldwell?"

"My land, no!" she exclaimed, with a gesture. "Who'd want to harm that poor old man? Why, he hadn't an enemy in the whole countryside—or anywhere else, for that matter. It's still hard for me to believe he was really murdered——"

"Have you any reason to believe," Coroner Webb asked quickly, "that his death came otherwise?"

She hesitated, her eyes lowered, her thin fingers twisting in nervous agitation.

"No," she said finally, and shook her head. "I just simply can't understand it."

The hearing was adjourned, the coroner's jury (composed of villagers, drawn to the old mansion by curiosity) gradually dispersed, and Chief McCready, smoking another of his cheap cigars, departed leisurely in his flivver to seek the housebreakers.

Barry, who had remained quietly in a corner during the proceedings, approached Mrs. Farson as she was leaving the room.

"Would you mind telling me," he smilingly asked, "just what was stolen here last night?"

"Not at all," she replied. "They stole 'most everything they could carry off—all the silver plate, and a lot of bric-a-brac and things. I gave Mr. McCready a complete description."

"And now, Mrs. Farson," he continued, lowering his voice so that the others could not hear, "please tell me what the burglars were *really looking for.*"

She was visibly startled by the question. Drawing sharply back, as though he had slapped her in the face, she stared at him in an odd, curious way. For the first time, perhaps, in her life, she was at a loss for speech.

"I—I don't—understand you," she stammered at last, with a perceptible effort to regain her composure. "What d'you mean, anyway? What *shoula* they be looking for?"

"That is what I am asking you." He smiled engagingly. "It is so perfectly obvious," he went on, motioning to the débris in the room, "that they were not merely seeking plate and such stuff, but something smaller, something infinitely more precious——"

"Well, if you're so smart," she cut in tartly, "find out for yourself what it was they were 'seeking'!"

And she swung crisply on her heel and left him.

He gazed after her, a wraith of the smile still lingering on his lips, a puzzled expression in his eyes; then, shrugging, he walked slowly into the adjoining room, and from thence into the dining-room beyond, his brows drawn together in mental concentration. The riddle was growing more complex.

While poking about in the dining-room, all his faculties centered on this riddle, he heard the housekeeper's voice beyond the door that led to the butler's-pantry. Unhesitatingly, he tiptoed nearer the door, and, under pretense of examining a broken teapot lying nearby, keenly listened. He gathered that she was in the kitchen, talking with two of her neighbors (a Mrs. Stacey and a Mrs. Lumbard),

whom he had noticed at the inquest; and he now overheard one of the women say:

"It must be a turrible shock to ye, ma'am. I wonder you stand it as well as ye do."

"I'm worn to a shred," grieved the housekeeper's voice, "what with the police and the coroner and all. And as if that wasn't quite enough, Mr. Thomas brings a young upstart from the City——"

"Oh, I meant to ask you, Mrs. Farson,"—this from the third woman,—"where's Cordelia?"

An appreciable silence followed this query. Then Barry heard Mrs. Farson say in a noticeably altered tone:

"Cordelia is gone. She disappeared last night. I'm afraid she won't ever return—*ever!*"

Hereon the other two women, singly and together, exclaimed with commiseration:

"What a pity! How you must miss her! Cordelia was so devoted to you! Did she run away, or . . ."

And now, quite suddenly, there came from the kitchen sounds of tearful lamentation. Unquestionably, Mrs. Farson was sobbing as though her heart would break! It also was clear that her friends were unable to stem this flood of anguish.

Barry turned from the door, the broken teapot in his lean hands, crossed to a west window of the dining-room, and stood gazing unseeingly across a meadow bathed in autumnal sunlight. The vertical line between his brows deepened. He was still standing here, in deep absorption, when Grusendorf, raking dead leaves from the lawn, came within sight.

He promptly put the teapot aside and started from the house. In the lower front hall he encountered Tom, who accompanied him outdoors to ask in a somewhat apologetic way:

"What have you said to Farson, old man? She tells me you've insulted her. Seemed quite peeved about it."

"I asked her a question," said Barry, "which nobody yet has answered. I'm sorry it offended her. I hope it won't offend the gardener, for I intend putting the same question

to him. But first, I want to ask *you* something: who, or what, is Cordelia?"

"Cordelia? I don't believe I know—Oh, yes, I do, too!" laughed Tom. "Cordelia is Farson's cat. An aged Maltese. Twelve years old, if it's a day. Farson raised it from kittenhood. Now you remind me of it, I haven't seen it around today."

"It disappeared last night," said Barry, "so Mrs. Farson says."

"That's a hard blow for her! Cordelia is the apple of her eye. She fairly worships the creature. But it'll come back, of course. You can't drive a cat away from its home."

"Mrs. Farson seems to think it's gone for good. Perhaps somebody stole it."

"Heaven help the thief if she ever catches him! She'd boil him in oil. I remember once, some years ago, I accidentally hurt the animal, and Farson flew at me in a rage, furious enough to scratch out my eyes."

"Mrs. Farson, I venture to say, has never been a mother?"

"She's a childless widow."

"That probably accounts for it. The maternal instinct in every woman must somehow find an outlet. In her case, I suppose, this outlet was supplied by a cat. She lavished upon it, evidently, all the affection which Nature gave her for her offspring—a perversion we all have noticed. . . . But I must ask Grusendorf a question or two. Care to come along?"

They walked to the side lawn, where the phlegmatic gardener was morosely raking the dead leaves into a heap and loading them upon a wheelbarrow. His habitual reticence was gradually broken down by Barry, who manifested a lively and intelligent interest in horticultural subjects; and presently they were chatting, with a fair degree of amiability, of the gorgeously-colored asters, the bright-hued, salvia border, the heavily-laden fruit trees, and of the most effective insecticides and fertilizers and kindred matters.

With all these things Barry displayed an unusual

familiarity (he had once been a salesman for a wholesale nursery), and he clearly was gaining the respect and confidence of Grusendorf until, in the course of conversation, he casually asked:

"Do you happen to know, Mr. Grusendorf, whether or not Mr. Caldwell had anything of considerable value hidden in his house?"

The gardener's tobacco-stained teeth came together with a *click*. At once his face assumed its stolid mask. He remained silent. Barry repeated the question.

"I don't know nawthin' about it," growled the old man, bruskly returning to his work.

"You know, of course," began Barry, pleasantly, "that Cordelia——"

He abruptly paused. Instantly, as the cat's name was uttered, an extraordinary change had come over Grusendorf. The rake fell from his nerveless hands, and he stood, apparently stupefied with fear, staring at his interrogator, his rheumy eyes wide, his mouth agape, his mien expressing a nameless terror.

"W-what about Cordelia?" he finally asked, barely above a whisper.

"She's gone, as you know. I thought perhaps you could tell us——"

"I can't tell you nawthin'!" the gardener cut in savagely. "Don't come talkin' to me about Cordelia!" Then, evidently fearing to trust himself further, he picked up his rake and hurried off, in his stoop-shouldered fashion, to the garden at the rear.

"Well, what the devil," gasped Tom, "d'you suppose is wrong with *him?*"

"I don't know," said Barry, after a pause, "but I'm going to find out. Could you, on some pretext, manage to get Mrs. Farson away for several hours?"

"I'll try. But what's the idea?"

"I want to search the house, if you'll permit me. It's impossible, of course, while she is here."

"You've my permission to search all you please; but how can I keep her out of your way?"

"Hire an automobile at the Glenwood garage and take her to Chicago. Tell her you must see your father's lawyer and need her signature on some legal papers. Then you can 'discover' the lawyer is out of town and drive her back. That'll give me four or five hours here alone."

Thirty minutes later, from an upper window, Barry watched Tom and the housekeeper depart; and when the motor-car had vanished down Glenview Road in a swirl of dust he went forthwith to the woman's room on the third floor. The door was locked; but a skeleton key, which he always carried, easily unlocked it.

The first thing he noticed, as he entered the room, was a large photograph of a Maltese cat, expensively framed and propped against the mirror of an old-fashioned bureau. As he stepped forward to examine this, a furry object rubbed purringly against his ankle, and he looked down to see a Maltese cat that seemed a replica of the one in the picture. Indeed, when he picked the animal up and held it to the light beside the photograph, he could discern between them no particle of difference.

Except these two things,—the cat and the photograph,—the room yielded nothing of interest to him; although he searched it most carefully, even opening the mattress and pillow with his penknife. Dissatisfied, he went out and locked the door; then, starting in the attic, he systematically and assiduously searched every foot of the house.

He had reached the basement and was rummaging through the objects there when the mellow *honk-k* of a motor siren, coming from the driveway, warned him of Tom's return. The quest was ended and he had found nothing of value—no trace of cocaine, or any other poison, or a hypodermic syringe, or aught that would give him the slightest clue.

When Tom and Mrs. Farson entered the lower hall, "Mr. Ennis," was sitting near a window of his room, at the rear of the second floor, calmly reading (apparently) a book he had found in the basement—a tattered volume entitled *"Anatomy of the Cat."*

Some nine hours later, or well past midnight, he was again sitting at his window; but he was not reading now, or even pretending to read. The room was dark and the window was open, and he sat on the ledge, smoking his pipe and gazing down through the scented darkness into the fragrant garden below. It was a warm night, unusually warm for autumn, and he had removed the greater part of his clothing.

The thought of going to bed had not occurred to him. He could not sleep, or think of sleep, until he had solved the mystery here. The solution, he believed, was almost in his grasp; yet, like a will-o'-the-wisp, it eluded and tantalized him.

For an indeterminate space he sat, quite motionless, gazing into the warm velvety night and drawing evenly on his brier pipe. The pipe finally went out, unheeded; but presently, preoccupied with his thoughts, he absently filled it from the pouch beside him and felt in his trousers for a match.

And then, all at once—just as he was about to strike the match—he caught his breath sharply, leaned further from the window, and stared fixedly at a spot in the garden, some eighty feet from the house.

His eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness so that he could distinguish, in a vague way, the flower beds and shrubbery; and what he saw there now caused him to slip hurriedly into his coat and, carrying his shoes in his hand, steal swiftly and noiselessly from the house.

Tingling with excitement, his pulse running high, he crept stealthily around the side of the house toward the garden.

He came to a halt behind a flowering hydrangea and, crouching here, fixed his attention upon a person—man or woman, he could not tell—who was digging a pit beneath the grape-arbor.

He could hear the dull ring of the spade as it crunched through dirt and gravel, could see the shapeless figure moving grotesquely in the dark; and then he saw this unknown figure go down on all fours, and he divined that

some object was being buried there—was sure of it when he heard the dirt shoveled back into the hole.

He was completely mystified, however, by the person's subsequent behavior. Dropping to a kneeling posture, the fantastic individual lifted clasped hands to heaven and remained in this suppliant attitude for a matter of several minutes.

When at last the wraithlike form arose, picked up the spade, and moved ghostily off through the shadows of the garden, Barry furtively followed. Maintaining a safe distance between them, he saw the person leave the spade in a shed used for garden tools and implements, then flit hastily across the pasture at the rear of the Caldwell estate.

In this open space, by the pale starlight he contrived to make out that the fleeing figure wore a full-length cloak with a cowl attached; but he still was unable to ascertain whether he was following a man or a woman.

The chase ended in a small forest about two miles west of the Caldwell home. In the heart of this dense wood the cowled figure entered a crude log-cabin, almost hidden by matted vines and trees and underbrush, and a moment later a light flared at the window.

Cautiously feeling his way through the jungle, fearful lest he make a sound, Barry crept to the window and peered inside—and, involuntarily, he almost exclaimed aloud. The interior of the cabin, a single low room, was scintillant with the light shed by a blazing candelabrum, and the astonishing thing he saw in the room not only filled him with amazement; it answered some questions that had baffled him for hours. Here, at a glance, he saw —or at least began to see—why Tom Caldwell's ancestral home had been violently ransacked last night and Amos Caldwell deliberately murdered.

Turning, he sped back to the Caldwell garden, took the spade from the tool-shed, and, digging up the spot where the cowled form had labored and afterward prayed, unearthed a metal casket somewhat larger than a shoe box. He replaced the earth in the hole, tamped it down with

the spade, carried the spade back to the shed, and took the box to his room.

With the door locked and the shade lowered, he lit his lamp and broke open the casket. It was lined with purple plush and contained (as he expected) the dead body of a Maltese cat.

Holding the animal near the light, he parted its bluish-gray hair and minutely examined the skin; finally, after an arduous search, he found what he sought—a perforation made by a hypodermic needle.

He returned the dead cat to its plush-lined coffin, looked at his watch, and consulted a railroad time-table. It was twenty minutes to four, and a train would leave for Chicago at 4:30. Writing a brief note to Tom (merely saying he'd return on the noon train), he wrapped the casket in an old newspaper, tucked the parcel under his arm, and set off through the dewy morning toward the Glenwood railroad station.

Young Caldwell, patently perturbed, met him at the station upon his midday return to Glenwood.

"What d'you suppose has happened, old man? McCready has caught the burglars! Found them early this morning in a deserted shanty west of town. Recovered the plunder, too. There are two of them, and he's got 'em both in the village jug. But what caused you to leave so precipitately?"

"I wanted an autopsy performed."

"You—*What?*"

"The autopsy proved that Cordelia was killed by cocaine, hypodermically administered."

"But Cordelia's not dead," insisted Tom, plainly puzzled. "She came home this morning. I saw her only an hour ago. Farson showed her to me."

"That wasn't Cordelia you saw—her daughter, maybe, or perhaps a sister, but not Cordelia. I've had Cordelia's body dissected, and I know she died of cocaine poisoning injected by a hypodermic syringe. The poison was injected, by the way, *directly above the heart.*"

Tom shook his head blankly. "I don't get you at all. If Farson doesn't know her own cat . . ."

"Give me twelve hours," said Barry, "and I'll tell you the name of your father's murderer. I'll do even better than that: I will deliver the murderer to McCready."

"But McCready already has the murderer—*both* murderers! He had them locked up, just as I said."

"Have they confessed?"

"Well, no. But they admit they burglarized the house. As for the murder——"

"What do they say about that?"

"They seemed dumbfounded when McCready charged them with it. They still pretend they know nothing about it. Of course they're lying."

"On the contrary," said Barry, "they are probably telling the truth."

"Perhaps, when you have questioned them——"

"But I shan't question them. In the first place," explained Barry, as Tom started to protest, "they can tell me nothing new, since I already know why they entered the house and what they were looking for; and, secondly, I've something else to do this afternoon, vastly more important. Where can I get a good saddle-horse?"

"Why—Floyd Mitchell's livery stable, I guess. I'll show you where it is."

As they started off together, Tom added in a contrite tone:

"Pardon me, old man, for getting so bumptious. But I wish you'd tell me what you have up your sleeve."

"I'd rather not, Tom—just yet. By midnight, however, you will agree with me that this is one of the strangest crimes ever perpetrated."

A little later, astride a roan horse in front of Mitchell's livery stable, Barry leaned down to say:

"I'll probably need you and McCready to-night. There's a schoolhouse at the crossroad, half a mile east of your house. Meet me there soon after dusk, and bring McCready. Meanwhile," he suggested, "you might let it be-

come known at the house, in a casual way, that I've returned to Chicago and am not coming back."

Then, with a wave of his hand, he was off. He turned to the left at the next street intersection and galloped away in a westerly direction; and Tom, watching him till he vanished from sight, walked slowly back to the police station, where Chief McCready, smoking one of his nickel cigars, sat on a stool before the bars of a cell, patiently questioning his prisoners.

The latter, booked under the names of Fred Keefer and Joe Lutkin, maintained a stubborn silence. Tom, in contrast to his prior excitement, now took slight interest in the interrogation. He had no idea what Barry had discovered, or what his discovery meant, but he had known his friend too long—had too often observed, with envious admiration, his astonishing faculty for solving mysterious riddles—to doubt his ability in the present instance. And he was convinced that McCready was wasting his time in trying to get a confession of murder.

Something Barry had said, however, suddenly recurred to him, and, on an impulse, he shot a question at the unkempt men behind the steel bars:

"What were you fellows really looking for in my father's house?"

Instantly the demeanor of the two housebreakers underwent a violent and startling change. The one known as Keefer half rose from the bunk on which he was sitting, his face denoting sudden alarm; while his companion, involuntarily, muttered a savage oath. Both were palpably frightened by the query.

"We was searchin'—" began Lutkin; but Keefer harshly silenced him, then sullenly addressed himself to Tom:

"Go find it yerself!" he growled.

Further questioning, however threatening or adroit, could not persuade either to speak again.

At twilight, Tom and McCready were waiting at the school-house; and with the approach of night they were joined by Barry, who appeared unexpectedly from a field at the roadside. He was covered with dust, his shirt and

collar were blood-stained, and across his right cheek there extended diagonally a jagged cut, red with blood. His chin had been slashed in similar fashion, and his hands were bleeding freely.

He vouchsafed no word of explanation, and Tom knew the futility of asking for one—knew that he, in his own good time, would explain everything. McCready, however, being unacquainted with the young sales-manager-detective, promptly exclaimed:

"Good gosh A'mighty! What's happened to you? Been fightin' with a buzz-saw?"

"Never mind about me," said Barry, crisply. "We've something more important to think about. I want you men to follow me, do exactly as I say, and ask no questions. It is essential that we use the utmost caution. If we are not extremely careful, the Caldwell home will be the scene of another murder to-night.

"I told Mr. Caldwell to-day," he continued, addressing McCready, who had tried to interrupt, "that the crime committed in his father's house, night before last, was one of the most singular in criminal history. The strange things you are going to see to-night will substantiate the statement. Now, then, if you two are willing to trust me——"

"We're with you," said McCready. "Just tell us what to do."

"Follow me," said Barry, and led them through the thickening dusk to the field from which he had emerged, athwart this field, thence into a woodlot, and finally to the pasture of the Caldwell estate.

He halted behind a lilac hedge, which divided the pasture from the garden, and bent his gaze upon the vague outline of the Caldwell stable. A pale light flickered at a small upper window.

"Wait here," he whispered, and, bending forward, crept toward the garden and vanished in the darkness.

In ten minutes he was back.

"It's all right. Come on."

Followed by Tom and McCready, he moved swiftly to the stable, unlatched the door, making no sound, and tip-

toed to a ladder and quickly climbed to the room above, where Otto Grusendorf, the gardener, sat sharpening a scythe-blade by the uncertain light of a smoking lantern.

As Barry sprang into the room, Grusendorf leapt to his feet and shoved back his chair, his broad face purpling with rage.

"Get out o' here!" he roared, and brandished the gleaming blade in his hand. "Get out, before I——" He saw McCready climbing through the opening in the floor and, suddenly stricken with fear, lowered the weapon and whimpered: "I ain't done nawthin', Chief. As God is my witness, I ain't——"

"Chief McCready," ordered Barry, in a voice of stern authority, "take this man in charge. Remove him to the hayloft. If he utters a sound, silence him with your revolver. Make him understand that his life depends on his remaining absolutely still."

He saw that his words had the desired result; then he said to young Caldwell, in a lower tone:

"Into the hay with them, Tom. You'll know when I need you."

When the three men had crawled through the window which opened into the haymow, Barry extinguished the light, stripped to his underclothing, and stretched his length on Grusendorf's canvas cot.

Lying on his right side, he fixed his eyes on that part of the floor where he knew the trapdoor to be; and, though the darkness was at first impenetrable, it gradually grew less black to his steadfast gaze, until at last he could see, somewhat obscurely, the square opening in the floor.

Wide awake, every nerve taut, he lay there for hours,—or so it seemed,—staring steadily at this hazy spot, before his vigil was rewarded. Then he heard a sound in the stable below; and then, his pulse quickening a bit, he heard somebody stealthily ascending the ladder.

In another moment there rose from the floor, in the spot on which his eyes were riveted, a cowled head. For the better part of a minute the head remained motionless, poised like that of a serpent, silently watching him. Then,

evidently satisfied, the owner of the head climbed the remaining rungs of the ladder and entered the room—a gaunt figure in a full-length cloak—and came toward him with cat-like tread.

Pausing beside the cot, the cowled figure stood looking down at him in a listening attitude. Barry was breathing evenly, audibly, as one who soundly sleeps. From beneath his lowered eyelids he saw the hooded form bend over him, felt fingers fumbling with his undershirt, felt a cold hand on his skin, groping for his heart.

And he seized the hand in a grip of steel and leaped from the cot. There was a brief struggle, a piercing scream, and the cloaked figure sank to the floor.

"All right, Tom! It's all over."

Scrambling through the hayloft window, Tom struck a match and lighted the lantern.

"Great heavens!" He gaped at the person huddled on the floor. *"Farson!"*

Barry took from her unresisting fingers a hypodermic syringe. "Here," he said, handing it to young Caldwell, "is the thing that killed your father. It also killed Cordelia. In another minute it would have killed me."

"But—good Lord!—why? *Why?"*

"Perhaps Mrs. Farson will answer you."

But Mrs. Farson, normally loquacious, now chose to say nothing. Dry-eyed, dumb, she stared stonily at the floor.

"She planned to kill Grusendorf," Barry explained, "because Grusendorf killed Cordelia. She killed your father, in exactly the same way Cordelia was killed, because your father ordered Cordelia's death. Isn't that right, Grusendorf?"

Grusendorf, who had climbed stiffly from the hayloft with Chief McCready, advanced into the circle of yellowish light—a grotesque figure in the eerie glow of the fluttering lantern—and stood blinking at the woman; and gradually, it seemed, his slow intelligence grasped the situation. His gnarled hands opened and closed; his weather-beaten face twitched with growing passion; he licked his dry lips and turned to Barry.

"I talk now!" He leveled a trembling forefinger at the woman. "She done it!" he barked hoarsely, breathing hard. "She killed the marster. When she found 'er cat dead, and learned how the marster made me do it, she got the p'isen away from me and told me to say nawthin', no matter what happened later on. She said she'd kill me if I said a word. So I didn't say nawthin', even when I seen it was her that killed the marster. But *now!*"—his voice, rising, shook with wrath—"I see *now* what she was aimin' to do! She was a-fixin' to p'isen me, anyway! . . ." His rage choked him. Unable to continue, he ground his teeth and shook his fists.

"But what about the burglary?" wondered Chief McCready. "What about them prisoners o' mine?"

"One of your prisoners," said Barry, "the one known as Keefer, is a distant relative of Mrs. Farson. A bad lot, always in trouble. He had asked her for money. She intimated, in a careful way, that her employer had hidden in the lower rooms a large amount of cash. Keefer and his pal, Lutkin, broke into the house, seeking the mythical booty. On the same night she killed Mr. Caldwell. The inference, of course, was that the burglars had killed him——"

"But, man alive!" exploded Tom. "She did all this for a *cat?*"

"Her passion for cats," said Barry, "is more extraordinary than you suppose. In fact, it's more than a passion—it's a mania. She worships the animal, somewhat as the ancient Egyptians did. Keeps twenty or more of them in a cabin. They seem to guard her secret possessions. At any rate, I visited her cabin this afternoon, and while examining her diary—which I found under the floor, and to which, by the way, she confided her plans for vengeance—several of the creatures attacked me——"

"You devil!" shrieked the woman, and sprang tigerishly at his face, her fingers distended, clawing like talons.

Barry caught her wrists and turned to McCready.

"You'd better take her, Chief."

# MARJORIE BOWEN

## CAMBRIC TEA

THE situation was bizarre; the accurately trained mind of Bevis Holroyd was impressed foremost by this; that the situation was bizaire; he could not guess that the opening of a door would turn it into tragedy.

"I am afraid I can't stay," he had said pleasantly, humouring a sick man; he was too young and had not been long enough completely successful to have a professional manner but a certain balanced tolerance just showed in his attitude to this prostrate creature.

"I've got a good many claims on my time," he added, "and I'm afraid it would be impossible. And it isn't the least necessary, you know. You're quite all right. I'll come back after Christmas if you really think it worth while."

The patient opened one eye; he was lying flat on his back in a deep, wide old-fashioned bed hung with a thick dark, silk lined tapestry; the room was dark for there were thick curtains of the same material drawn half across the windows, rigidly excluding all save a moiety of the pallid winter light; to make his examination Dr. Holroyd had had to snap on the electric light that stood on the bedside table; he thought it a dreary unhealthy room, but had hardly found it worth while to say as much.

The patient opened one eye; the other lid remained fluttering feebly over an immobile orb.

He said in a voice both hoarse and feeble:

"But, doctor, I'm being poisoned."

Professional curiosity and interest masked by genial incredulity instantly quickened the doctor's attention.

"My dear sir," he smiled, "poisoned by this nasty bout of 'flu you mean, I suppose——"

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"No," said the patient, faintly and wearily dropping both lids over his blank eyes, "by my wife."

"That's an ugly sort of fancy for you to get hold of," replied the doctor instantly. "Acute depression—we must see what we can do for you——"

The sick man opened both eyes now; he even slightly raised his head as he replied, not without dignity:

"I fetched you from London, Dr. Holroyd, that you might deal with my case impartially—from the local man there is no hope of that, he is entirely impressed by my wife."

Dr. Holroyd made a movement as if to protest but a trembling sign from the patient made him quickly subsist.

"Please let me speak. *She* will come in soon and I shall have no chance. I sent for you secretly, she knows nothing about that. I had heard you very well spoken of—as an authority on this sort of thing. You made a name over the Pluntre murder case as witness for the Crown."

"I don't specialize in murder," said Dr. Holroyd, but his keen handsome face was alight with interest. "And I don't care much for this kind of case—Sir Harry."

"But you've taken it on," murmured the sick man. "You couldn't abandon me now."

"I'll get you into a nursing home," said the doctor cheerfully, "and there you'll dispel all these ideas."

"And when the nursing home has cured me I'm to come back to my wife for her to begin again?"

Dr. Holroyd bent suddenly and sharply over the sombre bed. With his right hand he deftly turned on the electric lamp and tipped back the coral silk shade so that the bleached acid light fell full over the patient lying on his back on the big fat pillows.

"Look here," said the doctor, "what you say is pretty serious."

And the two men stared at each other, the patient examining his physician as acutely as his physician examined him.

Bevis Holroyd was still a young man with a look of peculiar energy and austere intelligence that heightened by

contrast purely physical dark good looks that many men would have found sufficient passport to success; resolution, dignity and a certain masculine sweetness, serene and strong, different from feminine sweetness, marked his demeanour which was further softened by a quick humour and a sensitive judgment.

The patient, on the other hand, was a man of well past middle age, light, flabby and obese with a flaccid, fallen look about his large face which was blurred and dimmed by the colours of ill health, being one pasty livid hue that threw into unpleasant relief the grey speckled red of his scant hair.

Altogether an unpleasing man, but of a certain fame and importance that had induced the rising young doctor to come at once when hastily summoned to Strangeways Manor House; a man of a fine, renowned family, a man of repute as a scholar, an essayist who had once been a politician who was rather above politics; a man whom Dr. Holroyd only knew vaguely by reputation, but who seemed to him symbolical of all that was staid, respectable and stolid.

And this man blinked up at him and whimpered:

"My wife is poisoning me."

Dr. Holroyd sat back and snapped off the electric light.

"What makes you think so?" he asked sharply.

"To tell you that," came the laboured voice of the sick man, "I should have to tell you my story."

"Well, if you want me to take this up——"

"I sent for you to do that, doctor."

"Well, how do you think you are being poisoned?"

"Arsenic, of course."

"Oh? And how administered?"

Again the patient looked up with one eye seeming too fatigued to open the other.

"Cambric tea," he replied.

And Dr. Holroyd echoed:

"Cambric tea!" with a soft amazement and interest.

Cambric tea had been used as the medium for arsenic in the Pluntre case and the expression had become famous

it was Bevis Holroyd who had discovered the doses in the cambric tea and who had put his finger on this pale beverage as the means of murder.

"Very possibly," continued Sir Harry, "the Pluntre case made her think of it."

"For God's sake, don't," said Dr. Holroyd; for in that hideous affair the murderer had been a woman and to see a woman on trial for her life, to see a woman sentenced to death was not an experience he wished to repeat.

"Lady Strangeways," continued the sick man, "is much younger than I—I over persuaded her to marry me, she was at the time very much attracted by a man of her own age, but he was in a poor position and she was ambitious."

He paused, wiped his quivering lips on a silk handkerchief, and added faintly:

"Lately our marriage has been extremely unhappy. The man she preferred is now prosperous, successful and unmarried—she wishes to dispose of me that she may marry her first choice."

"Have you proof of any of this?"

"Yes. I know she buys arsenic. I know she reads books on poisons. I know she is eating her heart out for this other man."

"Forgive me, Sir Harry," replied the doctor, "but have you no near friend nor relation to whom you can confide your—suspicions?"

"No one," said the sick man impatiently. "I have lately come from the East and am out of touch with people. Besides I want a doctor, a doctor with skill in this sort of thing. I thought from the first of the Pluntre case and of you."

Bevis Holroyd sat back quietly; it was then that he thought of the situation as bizarre; the queerness of the whole thing was vividly before him, like a twisted figure on a gem—a carving at once writhing and immobile.

"Perhaps," continued Sir Harry wearily, "you are married, doctor?"

"No." Dr. Holroyd slightly smiled; his story was something like the sick man's story but taken from another angle; when he was very poor and unknown he had loved a girl who had preferred a wealthy man; she had gone out to India, ten years ago, and he had never seen her since; he remembered this, with sharp distinctness, and in the same breath he remembered that he still loved this girl; it was, after all, a commonplace story.

Then his mind swung to the severe professional aspect of the case; he had thought that his patient, an unhealthy type of man, was struggling with a bad attack of influenza and the resultant depression and weakness, but then he had never thought, of course, of poison, nor looked nor tested for poison.

The man might be lunatic, he might be deceived, he might be speaking the truth; the fact that he was a mean, unpleasant beast ought not to weigh in the matter; Dr. Holroyd had some enjoyable Christmas holidays in prospect and now he was beginning to feel that he ought to give these up to stay and investigate this case; for he could readily see that it was one in which the local doctor would be quite useless.

"You must have a nurse," he said, rising.

But the sick man shook his head.

"I don't wish to expose my wife more than need be," he grumbled. "Can't you manage the affair yourself?"

As this was the first hint of decent feeling he had shown, Bevis Holroyd forgave him his brusque rudeness.

"Well, I'll stay the night anyhow," he conceded.

And then the situation changed, with the opening of a door, from the bizarre to the tragic.

This door opened in the far end of the room and admitted a bloom of bluish winter light from some uncurtained, high windowed corridor; the chill impression was as if invisible snow had entered the shaded, dun, close apartment.

And against this background appeared a woman in a smoke coloured dress with some long lace about the shoulders and a high comb; she held a little tray carry-

ing jugs and a glass of crystal in which the cold light splintered.

Dr. Holroyd stood in his usual attitude of attentive courtesy, and then, as the patient, feebly twisting his gross head from the fat pillow, said:

"My wife—doctor—" he recognized in Lady Strangeways the girl to whom he had once been engaged in marriage, the woman he still loved.

"This is Doctor Holroyd," added Sir Harry. "Is that cambric tea you have there?"

She inclined her head to the stranger by her husband's bed as if she had never seen him before, and he, taking his cue, and for many other reasons, was silent.

"Yes, this is your cambric tea," she said to her husband. "You like it just now, don't you? How do you find Sir Harry, Dr. Holroyd?"

There were two jugs on the tray; one of crystal half full of cold milk, and one of white porcelain full of hot water; Lady Strangeways proceeded to mix these fluids in equal proportions and gave the resultant drink to her husband, helping him first to sit up in bed.

"I think that Sir Harry has a nasty turn of influenza," answered the doctor mechanically. "He wants me to stay. I've promised till the morning, anyhow."

"That will be a pleasure and a relief," said Lady Strangeways gravely. "My husband has been ill some time and seems so much worse than he need—for influenza."

The patient, feebly sipping his cambric tea, grinned queerly at the doctor.

"So much worse—you see, doctor!" he muttered.

"It is good of you to stay," continued Lady Strangeways equally. "I will see about your room, you must be as comfortable as possible."

She left as she had come, a shadow coloured figure retreating to a chill light.

The sick man held up his glass as if he gave a toast.

"You see! Cambric tea!"

And Bevis Holroyd was thinking: does she not want to know me? Does he know what we once were to each

other? How comes she to be married to this man—her husband's name was Custiss—and the horror of the situation shook the calm that was his both from character and training; he went to the window and looked out on the bleached park; light, slow snow was falling, a dreary dance over the frozen grass and before the grey copses that paled, one behind the other to the distance shrouded in colourless mist.

The thin voice of Harry Strangeways recalled him to the bed.

"Would you like to take a look at this, doctor?" He held out the half drunk glass of milk and water.

"I've no means of making a test here," said Dr. Holroyd, troubled. "I brought a few things, nothing like that."

"You are not so far from Harley Street," said Sir Harry. "My car can fetch everything you want by this afternoon—or perhaps you would like to go yourself?"

"Yes," replied Bevis Holroyd sternly. "I would rather go myself."

His trained mind had been rapidly covering the main aspects of his problem and he had instantly seen that it was better for Lady Strangeways to have this case in his hands. He was sure there was some hideous, fantastic hallucination on the part of Sir Harry, but it was better for Lady Strangeways to leave the matter in the hands of one who was friendly towards her. He rapidly found and washed a medicine bottle from among the sick room paraphernalia and poured it full of the cambric tea, casting away the remainder.

"Why did you drink any?" he asked sharply.

"I don't want her to think that I guess," whispered Sir Harry. "Do you know, doctor, I have a lot of her love letters—written by——"

Dr. Holroyd cut him short.

"I couldn't listen to this sort of thing behind Lady Strangeways's back," he said quickly. "That is between you and her. My job is to get you well. I'll try and do that."

And he considered, with a faint disgust, how repulsive

this man looked sitting up with pendant jowl and drooping cheeks and discoloured, pouchy eyes sunk in pads of unhealthy flesh and above the spiky crown of Judas coloured hair.

Perhaps a woman, chained to this man, living with him, blocked and thwarted by him, might be wrought upon to——

Dr. Holroyd shuddered inwardly and refused to continue his reflection.

As he was leaving the gaunt sombre house about which there was something definitely blank and unfriendly, a shrine in which the sacred flames had flickered out so long ago that the lamps were blank and cold, he met Lady Strangeways.

She was in the wide entrance hall standing by the wood fire that but faintly dispersed the gloom of the winter morning and left untouched the shadows in the rafters of the open roof.

Now he would not, whether she wished or no, deny her; he stopped before her, blocking out her poor remnant of light.

"Mollie," he said gently, "I don't quite understand—you married a man named Custiss in India."

"Yes. Harry had to take this name when he inherited this place. We've been home three years from the East, but lived so quietly here that I don't suppose anyone has heard of us."

She stood between him and the firelight, a shadow among shadows; she was much changed; in her thinness and pallor, in her restless eyes and nervous mouth he could read signs of discontent, even of unhappiness.

"I never heard of you," said Dr. Holroyd truthfully. "I didn't want to. I liked to keep my dreams."

Her hair was yet the lovely cedar wood hue, silver, soft and gracious; her figure had those fluid lines of grace that he believed he had never seen equalled.

"Tell me," she added abruptly, "what is the matter with my husband? He has been ailing like this for a year or so."

With a horrid lurch of his heart that was usually so steady, Dr. Holroyd remembered the bottle of milk and water in his pocket.

"Why do you give him that cambric tea?" he counter questioned.

"He will have it—he insists that I make it for him——"

"Mollie," said Dr. Holroyd quickly, "you decided against me, ten years ago, but that is no reason why we should not be friends now—tell me, frankly, are you happy with this man?"

"You have seen him," she replied slowly. "He seemed different ten years ago. I honestly was attracted by his scholarship and his learning as well as—other things."

Bevis Holroyd needed to ask no more; she was wretched, imprisoned in a mistake as a fly in amber; and those love letters? Was there another man?

As he stood silent, with a dark reflective look on her weary brooding face, she spoke again:

"You are staying?"

"Oh yes," he said, he was staying, there was nothing else for him to do.

"It is Christmas week," she reminded him wistfully. "It will be very dull, perhaps painful, for you."

"I think I ought to stay."

Sir Harry's car was announced; Bevis Holroyd, gliding over frozen roads to London, was absorbed with this sudden problem that, like a mountain out of a plain, had suddenly risen to confront him out of his level life.

The sight of Mollie (he could not think of her by that sick man's name) had roused in him tender memories and poignant emotions and the position in which he found her and his own juxtaposition to her and her husband had the same devastating effect on him as a mine sprung beneath the feet of an unwary traveller.

London was deep in the whirl of a snow storm and the light that penetrated over the grey roof tops to the ugly slip of a laboratory at the back of his consulting rooms was chill and forbidding.

Bevis Holroyd put the bottle of milk on a marble slab

and sat back in the easy chair watching that dreary chase of snow flakes across the dingy London pane.

He was thinking of past springs, of violets long dead, of roses long since dust, of hours that had slipped away like lengths of golden silk rolled up, of the long ago when he had loved Mollie and Mollie had seemed to love him; then he thought of that man in the big bed who had said:

"My wife is poisoning me."

Late that afternoon Dr. Holroyd with his suit case and a professional bag, returned to Strangeways Manor House in Sir Harry's car; the bottle of cambric tea had gone to a friend, a noted analyst; somehow Doctor Holroyd had not felt able to do this task himself; he was very fortunate, he felt, in securing this old solitary and his promise to do the work before Christmas.

As he arrived at Strangeways Manor House which stood isolated and well away from a public high road where a lonely spur of the weald of Kent drove into the Sussex marshes, it was in a blizzard of snow that effaced the landscape and gave the murky outlines of the house an air of unreality, and Bevis Holroyd experienced that sensation he had so often heard of and read about, but which so far his cool mind had dismissed as a fiction.

He did really feel as if he was in an evil dream; as the snow changed the values of the scene, altering distances and shapes, so this meeting with Mollie, under these circumstances, had suddenly changed the life of Bevis Holroyd.

He had so resolutely and so definitely put this woman out of his life and mind, deliberately refusing to make enquiries about her, letting all knowledge of her cease with the letter in which she had written from India and announced her marriage.

And now, after ten years, she had crossed his path in this ghastly manner, as a woman her husband accused of attempted murder.

The sick man's words of a former lover disturbed him profoundly; was it himself who was referred to? Yet the love letters must be from another man for he had not

corresponded with Mollie since her marriage, not for ten years.

He had never felt any bitterness towards Mollie for her desertion of a poor, struggling doctor, and he had always believed in the integral nobility of her character under the timidity of conventionality; but the fact remained that she had played him false—what if that *had* been "the little rift within the lute" that had now indeed silenced the music!

With a sense of bitter depression he entered the gloomy old house; how different was this from the pleasant ordinary Christmas he had been rather looking forward to, the jolly homely atmosphere of good fare, dancing, and friends!

When he had telephoned to these friends excusing himself his regret had been genuine and the cordial "bad luck!" had had a poignant echo in his own heart; bad luck indeed, bad luck——

She was waiting for him in the hall that a pale young man was decorating with boughs of prickly stiff holly that stuck stiffly behind the dark heavy pictures.

He was introduced as the secretary and said gloomily:

"Sir Harry wished everything to go on as usual, though I am afraid he is very ill indeed."

Yes, the patient had been seized by another violent attack of illness during Dr. Holroyd's absence; the young man went at once upstairs and found Sir Harry in a deep sleep and a rather nervous local doctor in attendance.

An exhaustive discussion of the case with this doctor threw no light on anything, and Dr. Holroyd, leaving in charge an extremely sensible looking housekeeper who was Sir Harry's preferred nurse, returned, worried and irritated, to the hall where Lady Strangeways now sat alone before the big fire.

She offered him a belated but fresh cup of tea.

"Why did you come?" she asked as if she roused herself from deep reverie.

"Why? Because your husband sent for me."

"He says you offered to come; he has told everyone in the house that."

"But I never heard of the man before to-day."

"You had heard of me. He seems to think that you came here to help me."

"He cannot be saying that," returned Dr. Holroyd sternly, and he wondered desperately if Mollie was lying, if she had invented this to drive him out of the house.

"Do you want me here?" he demanded.

"I don't know," she replied dully and confirmed his suspicions; probably there was another man and she wished him out of the way; but he could not go, out of pity towards her he could not go.

"Does he know we once knew each other?" he asked.

"No," she replied faintly, "therefore it seems such a curious chance that he should have sent for you, of all men!"

"It would have been more curious," he responded grimly, "if I had heard that you were here with a sick husband and had thrust myself in to doctor him! Strangeways must be crazy to spread such a tale and if he doesn't know we are old friends it becomes nonsense!"

"I often think that Harry is crazy," said Lady Strangeways wearily; she took a rose silk lined work basket, full of pretty trifles, on her knee, and began winding a skein of rose coloured silk; she looked so frail, so sad, so lifeless that the heart of Bevis Holroyd was torn with bitter pity.

"Now I am here I want to help you," he said earnestly. "I am staying for that, to help you——"

She looked up at him with a wistful appeal in her fair face.

"I'm worried," she said simply. "I've lost some letters I valued very much—I think they have been stolen."

Dr. Holroyd drew back; the love letters; the letters the husband had found, that were causing all his ugly suspicions.

"My poor Mollie!" he exclaimed impulsively. "What sort of a coil have you got yourself into!"

As if this note of pity was unendurable she rose impulsively, scattering the contents of her work basket, dropping the skein of silk and hastened away down the dark hall.

Bevis Holroyd stooped mechanically to pick up the hurled objects and saw among them a small white packet, folded, but opened at one end; this packet seemed to have fallen out of a needle case of gold silk.

Bevis Holroyd had pounced on it and thrust it in his pocket just as the pale secretary returned with his thin arms most incongruously full of mistletoe.

"This will be a dreary Christmas for you, Dr. Holroyd," he said with the air of one who forces himself to make conversation. "No doubt you had some pleasant plans in view—we are all so pleased that Lady Strangeways had a friend to come and look after Sir Harry during the holidays."

"Who told you I was a friend?" asked Dr. Holroyd brusquely. "I certainly knew Lady Strangeways before she was married——"

The pale young man cut in crisply:

"Oh, Lady Strangeways told me so herself."

Bevis Holroyd was bewildered; why did she tell the secretary what she did not tell her husband?—both the indiscretion and the reserve seemed equally foolish.

Languidly hanging up his sprays and bunches of mistletoe the pallid young man, whose name was Garth Deane, continued his aimless remarks.

"This is really not a very cheerful house, Dr. Holroyd—I'm interested in Sir Harry's oriental work or I should not remain. Such a very unhappy marriage! I often think," he added regardless of Bevis Holroyd's darkling glance, "that it would be very unpleasant indeed for Lady Strangeways if anything happened to Sir Harry."

"Whatever do you mean, sir?" asked the doctor angrily.

The secretary was not at all discomposed.

"Well, one lives in the house, one has nothing much to do—and one notices."

Perhaps, thought the young man in anguish, the sick

husband had been talking to this creature, perhaps the creature *had* really noticed something.

"I'll go up to my patient," said Bevis Holroyd briefly, not daring to anger one who might be an important witness in this mystery that was at present so unfathomable.

Mr. Deane gave a sickly grin over the lovely pale leaves and berries he was holding.

"I'm afraid he is very bad, doctor."

As Bevis Holroyd left the room he passed Lady Strangeways; she looked blurred, like a pastel drawing that has been shaken; the fingers she kept locked on her bosom; she had flung a silver fur over her shoulders that accentuated her ethereal look of blonde, pearl and amber hues.

"I've come back for my work basket," she said. "Will you go up to my husband? He is ill again——"

"Have you been giving him anything?" asked Dr. Holroyd as quietly as he could.

"Only some cambric tea, he insisted on that."

"Don't give him anything—leave him alone. He is in my charge now, do you understand?"

She gazed up at him with frightened eyes that had been newly washed by tears.

"Why are you so unkind to me?" she quivered.

She looked so ready to fall that he could not resist the temptation to put his hand protectingly on her arm, so that, as she stood in the low doorway leading to the stairs, he appeared to be supporting her drooping weight.

"Have I not said that I am here to help you, Mollie?"

The secretary slipped out from the shadows behind them, his arms still full of winter evergreens.

"There is too much foliage," he smiled, and the smile told that he had seen and heard.

Bevis Holroyd went angrily upstairs; he felt as if an invisible net was being dragged closely round him, something that which, from being a cobweb would become a cable; this air of mystery, of horror in the big house, this sly secretary, these watchful looking servants, the nervous village doctor ready to credit anything, the lovely agitated woman who was the woman he had long so romantically

loved, and the sinister sick man with his diabolic accusations, a man Bevis Holroyd had, from the first moment, hated—all these people in these dark surroundings affected the young man with a miasma of apprehension, gloom and dread.

After a few hours of it he was nearer to losing his nerve than he had ever been; that must be because of Mollie, poor darling Mollie caught into all this nightmare.

And outside the bells were ringing across the snow, practising for Christmas Day; the sound of them was to Bevis Holroyd what the sounds of the real world are when breaking into a sleeper's thick dreams.

The patient sat up in bed, fondling the glass of odious cambric tea.

"Why do you take the stuff?" demanded the doctor angrily.

"She won't let me off, she thrusts it on me," whispered Sir Harry.

Bevis Holroyd noticed, not for the first time since he had come into the fell atmosphere of this dark house that enclosed the piteous figure of the woman he loved, that husband and wife were telling different tales, on one side lay a burden of careful lying.

"Did she——" continued the sick man, "speak to you of her lost letters?"

The young doctor looked at him sternly.

"Why should Lady Strangeways make a confidante of me?" he asked. "Do you know that she was a friend of mine ten years ago before she married you?"

"Was she? How curious! But you met like strangers."

"The light in this room is very dim——"

"Well, never mind about that, whether you knew her or not——" Sir Harry gasped out in a sudden snarl. "The woman is a murderess, and you'll have to bear witness to it—I've got her letters, here under my pillow, and Garth Deane is watching her——"

"Ah, a spy! I'll have no part in this, Sir Harry. You'll call another doctor——"

"No, it's your case, you'll make the best of it—My God, I'm dying, I think——"

He fell back in such a convulsion of pain that Bevis Holroyd forgot everything in administering to him. The rest of that day and all that night the young doctor was shut up with his patient, assisted by the secretary and the housekeeper.

And when, in the pallid light of Christmas Eve morning, he went downstairs to find Lady Strangeways he knew that the sick man was suffering from arsenic poison, that the packet taken from Mollie's work box was arsenic, and it was only an added horror when he was called to the telephone to learn that a stiff dose of the poison had been found in the specimen of cambric tea.

He believed that he could save the husband and thereby the wife also, but he did not think he could close the sick man's mouth; the deadly hatred of Sir Harry was leading up to an accusation of attempted murder; of that he was sure, and there was the man Deane to back him up.

He sent for Mollie, who had not been near her husband all night, and when she came, pale, distracted, huddled in her white fur, he said grimly:

"Look here, Mollie, I promised that I'd help you and I mean to, though it isn't going to be as easy as I thought, but you have got to be frank with me."

"But I have nothing to conceal——"

"The name of the other man——"

"The other man?"

"The man who wrote those letters your husband has under his pillow."

"Oh, Harry has them!" she cried in pain. "That man Deane stole them then! Bevis, they are your letters of the old days that I have always cherished."

"*My* letters!"

"Yes, do you think that there has ever been anyone else?"

"But he says—Mollie, there is a trap or trick here, some one is lying furiously. Your husband is being poisoned."

"Poisoned?"

"By arsenic given in that cambric tea. And he knows it. And he accuses you."

She stared at him in blank incredulity, then she slipped forward in her chair and clutched the big arm.

"Oh, God," she muttered in panic terror. "He always swore that he'd be revenged on me—because he knew that I never cared for him——"

But Bevis Holroyd recoiled; he did not dare listen, he did not dare believe.

"I've warned you," he said, "for the sake of the old days, Mollie——"

A light step behind them and they were aware of the secretary creeping out of the embrowning shadows.

"A cold Christmas," he said, rubbing his hands together. "A really cold, seasonable Christmas. We are almost snowed in—and Sir Harry would like to see you, Dr. Holroyd."

"I have only just left him——"

Bevis Holroyd looked at the despairing figure of the woman, crouching in her chair; he was distracted, overwrought, near to losing his nerve.

"He wants particularly to see you," cringed the secretary.

Mollie looked back at Bevis Holroyd, her lips moved twice in vain before she could say: "Go to him."

The doctor went slowly upstairs and the secretary followed.

Sir Harry was now flat on his back, staring at the dark tapestry curtains of his bed.

"I'm dying," he announced as the doctor bent over him.

"Nonsense. I am not going to allow you to die."

"You won't be able to help yourself. I've brought you here to see me die."

"What do you mean?"

"I've a surprise for you too, a Christmas present. These letters now, these love letters of my wife's—what name do you think is on them?"

"Your mind is giving way, Sir Harry."

"Not at all—come nearer, Deane—the name is Bevis Holroyd."

"Then they are letters ten years old. Letters written before your wife met you."

The sick man grinned with infinite malice.

"Maybe. But there are no dates on them and the envelopes are all destroyed. And I, as a dying man, shall swear to their recent date—I, as a foully murdered man."

"You are wandering in your mind," said Bevis Holroyd quietly. "I refuse to listen to you any further."

"You shall listen to me. I brought you here to listen to me. I've got you. Here's my will, Deane's got that, in which I denounced you both, there are your letters, every one thinks that *she* put you in charge of the case, every one knows that you know all about arsenic in cambric tea through the Pluntre case, and every one will know that I die of arsenic poisoning."

The doctor allowed him to talk himself out; indeed it would have been difficult to check the ferocity of his malicious energy.

The plot was ingenious, the invention of a slightly insane, jealous recluse who hated his wife and hated the man she had never ceased to love; Bevis Holroyd could see the nets very skilfully drawn round him; but the main issue of the mystery remained untouched; who *was* administering the arsenic?

The young man glanced across the sombre bed to the dark figure of the secretary.

"What is your place in all this farrago, Mr. Deane?" he asked sternly.

"I'm Sir Harry's friend," answered the other stubbornly, "and I'll bring witness any time against Lady Strangeways. I've tried to circumvent her——"

"Stop," cried the doctor. "You think that Lady Strangeways is poisoning her husband and that I am her accomplice?"

The sick man, who had been looking with bitter malice from one to another, whispered hoarsely:

"That is what you think, isn't it, Deane?"

"I'll say what I think at the proper time," said the secretary obstinately.

"No doubt you are being well paid for your share in this."

"I've remembered his services in my will," smiled Sir Harry grimly. "You can adjust your differences then, Dr. Holroyd, when I'm dead, *poisoned, murdered.* It will be a pretty story, a nice scandal, you and she in the house together, the letters, the cambric tea!"

An expression of ferocity dominated him, then he made an effort to dominate this and to speak in his usual suave stilted manner.

"You must admit that we shall all have a very Happy Christmas, doctor."

Bevis Holroyd was looking at the secretary, who stood the other side of the bed, cringing, yet somehow in the attitude of a man ready to pounce; Dr. Holroyd wondered if this was the murderer.

"Why," he asked quietly to gain time, "did you hatch this plan to ruin a man you had never seen before?"

"I always hated you," replied the sick man faintly. "Mollie never forgot you, you see, and she never allowed *me* to forget that she never forgot you. And then I found those letters she had cherished."

"You are a very wicked man," said the doctor drily, "but it will all come to nothing, for I am not going to allow you to die."

"You won't be able to help yourself," replied the patient. "I'm dying, I tell you. I shall die on Christmas Day."

He turned his head towards the secretary and added:

"Send my wife up to me."

"No," interrupted Dr. Holroyd strongly. "She shall not come near you again."

Sir Harry Strangeways ignored this.

"Send her up," he repeated.

"I will bring her, sir."

The secretary left, with a movement suggestive of flight, and Bevis Holroyd stood rigid, waiting, thinking,

looking at the ugly man who now had closed his eyes and lay as if insensible. He was certainly very ill, dying perhaps, and he certainly had been poisoned by arsenic given in cambric tea, and, as certainly, a terrible scandal and a terrible danger would threaten with his death; the letters were *not* dated, the marriage was notoriously unhappy, and he, Bevis Holroyd, was associated in every one's mind with a murder case in which this form of poison, given in this manner, had been used.

Drops of moisture stood out on the doctor's forehead; if he could clear himself be sure that it would be very difficult for Mollie to do so; how could even he himself in his soul swear to her innocence!

Of course he must get the woman out of the house at once, he must have another doctor from town, nurses—but could this be done in time; if the patient died on his hands would he not be only bringing witnesses to his own discomfiture? And the right people, his own friends, were difficult to get hold of now, at Christmas time.

He longed to go in search of Mollie—she must at least be got away, but how, without a scandal, without a suspicion?

He longed also to have the matter out with this odious secretary, but he dared not leave his patient.

Lady Strangeways returned with Garth Deane and seated herself, mute, shadowy, with eyes full of panic, on the other side of the sombre bed.

"Is he going to live?" she presently whispered as she watched Bevis Holroyd ministering to her unconscious husband.

"We must see that he does," he answered grimly.

All through that Christmas Eve and the bitter night to the stark dawn when the church bells broke ghastly on their wan senses did they tend the sick man who only came to his senses to grin at them in malice.

Once Bevis Holroyd asked the pallid woman:

"What was that white packet you had in your work box?"

And she replied:

"I never had such a packet."

And he:

"I must believe you."

But he did not send for the other doctors and nurses, he did not dare.

The Christmas bells seemed to rouse the sick man from his deadly swoon.

"You can't save me," he said with indescribable malice. "I shall die and put you both in the dock——"

Mollie Strangeways sank down beside the bed and began to cry, and Garth Deane, who by his master's express desire had been in and out of the room all night, stopped and looked at her with a peculiar expression. Sir Harry looked down at her also.

"Don't cry," he gasped, "this is Christmas Day. We ought all to be happy—bring me my cambric tea—do you hear?"

She rose mechanically and left the room to take in the tray with the fresh milk and water that the housekeeper had placed softly on the table outside the door; for all through the nightmare vigil, the sick man's cry had been for "cambric tea."

As he sat up in bed feebly sipping the vapid and odious drink the tortured woman's nerves slipped her control.

"I can't endure those bells, I wish they would stop those bells!" she cried and ran out of the room.

Bevis Holroyd instantly followed her; and now as suddenly as it had sprung on him, the fell little drama disappeared, fled like a poison cloud out of the compass of his life.

Mollie was leaning against the closed window, her sick head resting against the mullions; through the casement showed, surprisingly, sunlight on the pure snow and blue sky behind the withered trees.

"Listen, Mollie," said the young man resolutely. "I'm sure he'll live if you are careful—you mustn't lose heart——"

The sick room door opened and the secretary slipped out.

He nervously approached the two in the window place.

"I can't stand this any longer," he said through dry lips. "I didn't know he meant to go so far, he is doing it himself, you know; he's got the stuff hidden in his bed, he puts it into the cambric tea, he's willing to die to spite you two, but I can't stand it any longer."

"You've been abetting this!" cried the doctor.

"Not abetting," smiled the secretary wanly. "Just standing by. I found out by chance—and then he forced me to be silent—I had his will, you know, and I've destroyed it."

With this the strange creature glided downstairs.

The doctor sprang at once to Sir Harry's room; the sick man was sitting up in the sombre bed and with a last effort was scattering a grain of powder into the glass of cambric tea.

With a look of baffled horror he saw Bevis Holroyd but the drink had already slipped down his throat; he fell back and hid his face, baulked at the last of his diabolic revenge.

When Bevis Holroyd left the dead man's chamber he found Mollie still leaning in the window; she was free, the sun was shining, it was Christmas Day.

# ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

## THE HARD-BOILED EGG

WALKING close along the wall, to avoid the creaking floor boards, Philo Gubb, paper-hanger and student of the Rising Sun Detective Agency's Correspondence School of Detecting, tiptoed to the door of the bedroom he shared with the mysterious Mr. Critz. In appearance Mr. Gubb was tall and gaunt, reminding one of a modern Don Quixote or a human flamingo; by nature Mr. Gubb was the gentlest and most simple-minded of men. Now, bending his long, angular body almost double, he placed his eye to a crack in the door panel and stared into the room. Within, just out of the limited area of Mr. Gubb's vision, Roscoe Critz paused in his work and listened carefully. He heard the sharp whistle of Mr. Gubb's breath as it cut against the sharp edge of the crack in the panel, and he knew he was being spied upon. He placed his chubby hands on his knees and smiled at the door, while a red flush of triumph spread over his face.

Through the crack in the door Mr. Gubb could see the top of the washstand beside which Mr. Critz was sitting, but he could not see Mr. Critz. As he stared, however, he saw a plump hand appear and pick up, one by one, the articles lying on the washstand. They were: First, seven or eight half shells of English walnuts; second, a rubber shoe heel out of which a piece had been cut; third, a small rubber ball no larger than a pea; fourth, a paper-bound book; and lastly, a large and glittering brick of yellow gold. As the hand withdrew the golden brick, Mr. Gubb pressed his face closer against the door in his effort to see more, and suddenly the door flew open and Mr. Gubb

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sprawled on his hands and knees on the worn carpet of the bedroom.

"There, now!" said Mr. Critz. "There, now! Serves you right. Hope you hurt chuself!"

Mr. Gubb arose slowly, like a giraffe, and brushed his knees.

"Why?" he asked.

"Snoopin' an' sneakin' like that!" said Mr. Critz crossly. "Scarin' me to fits, a'most. How'd I know who 't was? If you want to come in, why don't you come right in, 'stead of snoopin' an' sneakin' an' fallin' in that way?"

As he talked, Mr. Critz replaced the shells and the rubber heel and the rubber pea and the gold-brick on the washstand. He was a plump little man with a shiny bald head and a white goatee. As he talked, he bent his head down, so that he might look above the glasses of his spectacles; and in spite of his pretended anger he looked like nothing so much as a kindly, benevolent old gentleman —the sort of old gentleman that keeps a small store in a small village and sells writing-paper that smells of soap, and candy sticks out of a glass jar with a glass cover.

"How'd I know but what you was a detective?" he asked, in a gentler tone.

"I am," said Mr. Gubb soberly, seating himself on one of the two beds. "I'm putty near a deteckative, as you might say."

"Ding it all!" said Mr. Critz. "Now I got to go and hunt another room. I can't room with no detective."

"Well, now, Mr. Critz," said Mr. Gubb, "I don't want you should feel that way."

"Knowin' you are a detective makes me all nervous," complained Mr. Critz; "and a man in my business has to have a steady hand, don't he?"

"You ain't told me what your business is," said Mr. Gubb.

"You need n't pretend you don't know," said Mr. Critz. "Any detective that saw that stuff on the washstand would know."

"Well, of course," said Mr. Gubb, "I ain't a full de-

teckative yet. You can't look for me to guess things as quick as a full deteckative would. Of course that brick sort of looks like a gold-brick—"

"It *is* a gold-brick," said Mr. Critz.

"Yes," said Mr. Gubb. "But—I don't mean no offense, Mr. Critz—from the way you look—I sort of thought—well, that it was a gold-brick you'd bought."

Mr. Critz turned very red.

"Well, what if I did buy it?" he said. "That ain't any reason I can't sell it, is it? Just because a man buys eggs once—or twice—ain't any reason he should n't go into the business of egg-selling, is it? Just because I've bought one or two gold-bricks in my day ain't any reason I should n't go to sellin' 'em, is it?"

Mr. Gubb stared at Mr. Critz with unconcealed surprise.

"You ain't,—you ain't a con' man, are you, Mr. Critz?" he asked.

"If I ain't yet, that's no sign I ain't goin' to be," said Mr. Critz firmly. "One man has as good a right to try his hand at it as another, especially when a man has had my experience in it. Mr. Gubb, there ain't hardly a con' game I ain't been conned with. I been confidenced long enough; from now on I'm goin' to confidence other folks. That's what I'm goin' to do; and I won't be bothered by no detective livin' in the same room with me. Detectives and con' men don't mix noways! No, sir!"

"Well, sir!" said Mr. Gubb, "I can see the sense of that. But you don't need to move right away. I don't aim to start in deteckating in earnest for a couple of months yet. I got a couple of jobs of paper-hanging and decorating to finish up, and I can't start in sleuthing until I get my star, anyway. And I don't get my star until I get one more lesson, and learn it, and send in the examination paper, and five dollars extra for the diploma. Then I'm goin' at it as a reg'lar business. It's a good business. Every day there's more crooks—excuse me, I did n't mean to say that."

"That's all right," said Mr. Critz kindly. "Call a spade a spade. If I ain't a crook yet, I hope to be soon."

"I did n't know how you'd feel about it," explained Mr. Gubb. "Tactfulness is strongly advised into the lessons of the Rising Sun Deteckative Agency Correspondence School of Deteckating—"

"Slocum, Ohio?" asked Mr. Critz quickly. "You did n't see the ad. in the 'Hearthstone and Farmside,' did you?"

"Yes, Slocum, Ohio," said Mr. Gubb, "and that is the paper I saw the ad. into; 'Big Money in Deteckating. Be a Sleuth. We can make you the equal of Sherlock Holmes in twelve lessons.' Why?"

"Well, sir," said Mr. Critz, "that's funny. That ad. was right atop of the one I saw, and I studied quite considerable before I could make up my mind whether 't would be best for me to be a detective and go out and get square with the fellers that sold me gold-bricks and things by putting them in jail, or to even things up by sending for this book that was advertised right under the 'Rising Sun Correspondence School.' How come I settled to do as I done was that I had a sort of stock to start with, with a fust-class gold-brick, and some green goods I'd bought; and this book only cost a quatter of a dollar. And she's a hummer for a quatter of a dollar! A hummer!"

He pulled the paper-covered book from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Gubb. The title of the book was "The Complete Con' Man, by the King of the Grafters. Price 25 cents."

"That there book," said Mr. Critz proudly, as if he himself had written it, "tells everything a man need to know to work every con' game there is. Once I get it by heart, I won't be afraid to try any of them. Of course, I got to start in small. I can't hope to pull off a wire-tapping game right at the start, because that has to have a gang. You don't know anybody you could recommend for a gang, do you?"

"Not right offhand," said Mr. Gubb thoughtfully.

"If you was n't goin' into the detective business," said Mr. Critz, "you'd be just the feller for me. You look sort of honest and not as if you was too bright, and that counts a lot. Even in this here simple little shell game, I got to

have a podner. I got to have a podner I can trust, so I can let him look like he was winnin' money off of me. You see," he explained, moving to the washstand, "this shell game is easy enough when you know how. I put three shells down like this, on a stand, and I put the little rubber pea on the stand, and then I take up the three shells like this, two in one hand and one in the other, and I wave 'em around over the pea, and maybe push the pea around a little, and I say, 'Come on! Come on! The hand is quicker than the eye!' And all of a sudden I put the shells down, and you think the pea is under one of them, like that—"

"I don't think the pea is under one of 'em," said Mr. Gubb. "I seen it roll onto the floor."

"It did roll onto the floor that time," said Mr. Critz apologetically. "It most generally does for me, yet. I ain't got it down to perfection yet. This is the way it ought to work—oh, pshaw! there she goes onto the floor again! Went under the bed that time. Here she is! Now, the way she ought to work is—there she goes again!"

"You got to practice that game a lot before you try it onto folks in public, Mr. Critz," said Mr. Gubb seriously.

"Don't I know that?" said Mr. Critz rather impatiently. "Same as you've got to practice snoopin', Mr. Gubb. Maybe you thought I did n't know you was snoopin' after me wherever I went last night."

"Did you?" asked Mr. Gubb, with surprise plainly written on his face.

"I seen you every moment from nine P.M. till eleven!" said Mr. Critz. "I did n't like it, neither."

"I did n't think to annoy you," apologized Mr. Gubb. "I was practicin' Lesson Four. You was n't supposed to know I was there at all."

"Well, I don't like it," said Mr. Critz. " 'T was all right last night, for I did n't have nothin' important on hand, but if I'd been workin' up a con' game, the feller I was after would have thought it mighty strange to see a man follerin' me everywhere like that. If you went about it quiet and unobtrusive, I would n't mind; but if I'd had

a customer on hand and he'd seen you it would make him nervous. He'd think there was a—a crazy man follerin' us."

"I was just practicin'," apologized Mr. Gubb. "It won't be so bad when I get the hang of it. We all got to be beginners sometime."

"I guess so," said Mr. Critz, rearranging the shells and the little rubber pea. "Well, I put the pea down like this, and I dare you to bet which shell she's goin' to be under, and you don't bet, see? So I put the shells down, and you're willin' to bet you see me put the first shell over the pea like this. So you keep your eye on that shell. and I move the shells around like this—"

"She's under the same shell," said Mr. Gubb.

"Well, yes she *is*," said Mr. Critz placidly, "but she had n't ought to be. By rights she ought to sort of ooze out from under whilst I'm movin' the shells around, and I'd ought to sort of catch her in between my fingers and hold her there so you don't see her. Then when you say which shell she's under, she ain't under any shell; she's between my fingers. So when you put down your money I tell you to pick up that shell and there ain't anything under it. And before you can pick up the other shells I pick one up, and let the pea fall on the stand like it had been under that shell all the time. That's the game, only up to now I ain't got the hang of it. She won't ooze out from under, and she won't stick between my fingers, and when she does stick, she won't drop at the right time."

"Except for that, you're got her all right, have you?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"Except for that," said Mr. Critz; "and I'd have that, only my fingers are stubby."

"What was it you thought of having me do if I was n't a deteckative?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"The work you'd have to do would be capping work," said Mr. Critz. "Capper—that's the professional name for it. You'd guess which shell the ball was under—"

"That would be easy, the way you do it now," said Mr. Gubb.

"I told you I'd got to learn it better, did n't I?" asked

Mr. Critz impatiently. "You'd be capper, and you'd guess which shell the pea was under. No matter which you guessed, I'd leave it under that one, so's you'd win, and you'd win ten dollars every time you bet—but not for keeps. That's why I've got to have an honest capper."

"I can see that," said Mr. Gubb; "but what's the use lettin' me win it if I've got to bring it back?"

"That starts the boobs bettin'," said Mr. Critz. "The boobs see how you look to be winnin', and they want to win too. But they don't. When they bet, I win."

"That ain't a square game," said Mr. Gubb seriously, "is it?"

"A crook ain't expected to be square," said Mr. Critz. "It stands to reason, if a crook wants to be a crook, he's got to be crooked, ain't he?"

"Yes, of course," said Mr. Gubb. "I had n't looked at it that way."

"As far as I can see," said Mr. Critz, "the more I know how a detective acts, the better off I'll be when I start in doin' real business. Ain't that so? I guess, till I get the hang of things better, I'll stay right here."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Mr. Critz," said Mr. Gubb with relief. "I like you, and I like your looks, and there's no tellin' who I might get for a roommate next time. I might get some one that was n't honest."

So it was agreed, and Mr. Critz stood over the wash-stand and manipulated the little rubber pea and the three shells, while Mr. Gubb sat on the edge of the bed and studied Lesson Eleven of the "Rising Sun Detective Agency's Correspondence School of Detecting."

When, presently, Mr. Critz learned to work the little pea neatly, he urged Mr. Gubb to take the part of capper, and each time Mr. Gubb won he gave him a five-dollar bill. Then Mr. Gubb posed as a "boob" and Mr. Critz won all the money back again, beaming over his spectacle rims, and chuckling again and again until he burst into a fit of coughing that made him red in the face, and did not cease until he had taken a big drink of water out of the wash-pitcher. Never had he seemed more like a kindly

old gentleman from behind the candy counter of a small village. He hung over the washstand, manipulating the little rubber pea as if fascinated.

"Ain't it curyus how a feller catches onto a thing like that all to once?" he said after a while. "If it had n't been that I was so anxious, I might have fooled with that for weeks and weeks and not got anywheres with it. I do wisht you could be my capper a while anyway, until I could get one."

"I need all my time to study," said Mr. Gubb. "It ain't easy to learn deteckating by mail."

"Pshaw, now!" said Mr. Critz. "I'm real sorry! Maybe if I was to pay you for your time and trouble five dollars a night? How say?"

Mr. Gubb considered. "Well, I dunno!" he said slowly. "I sort of hate to take money for doin' a favor like that."

"Now, there ain't no need to feel that way," said Mr. Critz. "Your time's wuth somethin' to me—it's wuth a lot to me to get the hang of this gold-brick game. Once I get the hang of it, it won't be no trouble for me to sell gold-bricks like this one for all the way from a thousand dollars up. I paid fifteen hundred for this one myself, and got it cheap. That's a good profit, for this brick ain't wuth a cent over one hundred dollars, and I know, for I took it to the bank after I bought it, and that's what they was willin' to pay me for it. So it's easy wuth a few dollars for me to have help whilst I'm learnin'. I can easy afford to pay you a few dollars, and to pay a friend of yours the same."

"Well, now," said Mr. Gubb, "I don't know but what I might as well make a little that way as any other. I got a friend—" He stopped short. "You don't aim to *sell* the gold-brick to him, do you?"

Mr. Critz's eyes opened wide behind their spectacles.

"Land's sakes, no!" he said.

"Well, I got a friend may be willing to help out," said Mr. Gubb. "What'd he have to do?"

"You or him," said Mr. Critz, "would be the 'come-on,' and pretend to buy the brick. And you or him would pre-

tend to help me to sell it. Maybe you better have the brick, because you can look stupid, and the feller that's got the brick has got to look that."

"I can look anyway a'most," said Mr. Gubb with pride.

"Do tell!" said Mr. Critz, and so it was arranged that the first rehearsal of the gold-brick game should take place the next evening, but as Mr. Gubb turned away Mr. Critz deftly slipped something into the student detective's coat pocket.

It was toward noon the next day that Mr. Critz, peering over his spectacles and avoiding as best he could the pails of paste, entered the parlor of the vacant house where Mr. Gubb was at work.

"I just come around," said Mr. Critz, rather reluctantly, "to say you better not say nothing to your friend. I guess that deal's off."

"Pshaw, now!" said Mr. Gubb. "You don't mean so!"

"I don't mean nothing in the way of aspersions, you mind," said Mr. Critz with reluctance, "but I guess we better call it off. Of course, so far as I know, you are all right—"

"I don't know what you're gettin' at," said Mr. Gubb. "Why don't you say it?"

"Well, I been buncoed so often," said Mr. Critz. "Seem's like any one can get money from me any time and any way, and I got to thinkin' it over. I don't know anything about you, do I? And here I am, going to give you a gold-brick that cost me fifteen hundred dollars, and let you go out and wait until I come for it with your friend, and—well, what's to stop you from just goin' away with that brick and never comin' back?"

Mr. Gubb looked at Mr. Critz blankly.

"I've went and told my friend," he said. "He's all ready to start in."

"I hate it, to have to say it," said Mr. Critz, "but when I come to count over them bills I lent you to cap the shell game with, there was a five-dollar one short."

"I know," said Gubb, turning red. "And if you go over there to my coat, you'll find it in my pocket, all ready to

hand back to you. I don't know how I come to keep it in my pocket. Must ha' missed it, when I handed you back the rest."

"Well, I had a notion it was that way," said Mr. Critz kindly. "You look like you was honest, Mr. Gubb. But a thousand-dollar gold-brick, that any bank will pay a hundred dollars for—I got to get out of this way of trustin' everybody—"

Mr. Critz was evidently distressed.

"If 't was anybody else but you," he said with an effort, "I'd make him put up a hundred dollars to cover the cost of a brick like that whilst he had it. There! I've said it, and I guess you're mad!"

"I ain't mad," protested Mr. Gubb, "long as you're goin' to pay me and Pete, and it's business; I ain't so set against puttin' up what the brick is worth."

Mr. Critz heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"You don't know how good that makes me feel," he said. "I was almost losin' what faith in mankind I had left."

Mr. Gubb ate his frugal evening meals at the Pie Wagon, on Willow Street, just off Main, where, by day, Pie-Wagon Pete dispensed light viands; and Pie-Wagon Pete was the friend he had invited to share Mr. Critz's generosity. The seal of secrecy had been put on Pie-Wagon Pete's lips before Mr. Gubb offered him the opportunity to accept or decline; and when Mr. Gubb stopped for his evening meal, Pie-Wagon Pete—now off duty—was waiting for him. The story of Mr. Critz and his amateur con' business had amused Pie-Wagon Pete. He could hardly believe such utter innocence existed. Perhaps he did not believe it existed, for he had come from the city, and he had had shady companions before he landed in Riverbank. He was a sharp-eyed, red-headed fellow, with a hard fist, and a scar across his face, and when Mr. Gubb had told him of Mr. Critz and his affairs, he had seen an opportunity to shear a country lamb.

"How goes it for to-night, Philo?" he asked Mr. Gubb,

taking the stool next to Mr. Gubb, while the night man drew a cup of coffee.

"Quite well," said Mr. Gubb. "Everything is arranged satisfactory. I'm to be on the old houseboat by the wharf-house on the levee at nine, with *it*." He glanced at the night man's back and lowered his voice. "And Mr. Critz will bring you there."

"Nine, eh?" said Pie-Wagon. "I meet him at your room, do I?"

"You meet him at the Riverbank Hotel at eight-forty-five," said Mr. Gubb. "Like it was the real thing. I'm goin' over to my room now, and give him the money—"

"What money?" asked Pie-Wagon Pete quickly.

"Well, you see," said Mr. Gubb, "he sort of hated to trust the—trust *it* out of his hands without a deposit. It's the only one he has. So I thought I'd put up a hundred dollars. He's all right—"

"Oh, sure!" said Pie-Wagon. "A hundred dollars, eh?"

He looked at Mr. Gubb, who was eating a piece of apple pie hand-to-mouth fashion, and studied him in a new light.

"One hundred dollars, eh?" he repeated thoughtfully. "You give him a hundred-dollar deposit now and he meets you at nine, and me at eight-forty-five, and the train leaves for Chicago at eight-forty-three, halfway between the house-boat and the hotel! Say, Gubby, what does this old guy look like?"

Mr. Gubb, albeit with a tongue unused to description, delineated Mr. Critz as best he could, and as he proceeded, Pie-Wagon Pete became interested.

"Pinkish, and bald? Top of his head like a hard-boiled egg? He ain't got a scar across his face? The dickens he has! Short and plump, and a reg'lar old nice grandpa? Blue eyes? Say, did he have a coughin' spell and choke red in the face? Well, sir, for a brand-new detective, you've done well. Listen, Jim: Gubby's got the Hard-Boiled Egg!"

The night man almost dropped his cup of coffee.

"Go 'way!" he said. "Old Hard-Boiled? Himself?"

"That's right! And caught him with the goods. Say, listen, Gubby!"

For five minutes Pie-Wagon Pete talked, while Mr. Gubb sat with his mouth wide open.

"See?" said Pie-Wagon at last. "And don't you mention me at all. Don't mention no one. Just say to the Chief: 'And havin' trailed him this far, Mr. Whittaker, and arranged to have him took with the goods, it's up to you?' See? And as soon as you say that, have him send a couple of bulls with you, and if they can do it, they'll nab Old Hard-Boiled just as he takes your cash. And Old Sleuth and Sherlock Holmes won't be in it with you when tomorrow mornin's papers come out. Get it?"

Mr. Gubb got it. When he entered his bedroom, Mr. Critz was waiting for him. It was slightly after eight o'clock; perhaps eight-fifteen. Mr. Critz had what appeared to be the gold-brick neatly wrapped in newspaper, and he looked up with his kindly blue eyes. He had been reading the "Complete Con' Man," and had pushed his spectacles up on his forehead as Mr. Gubb entered.

"I done that brick up for you," he said, indicating it with his hand, "so's it would n't glitter whilst you was goin' through the street. If word got passed around there was a gold-brick in town, folks might sort of get suspicious-like. Nice night for goin' out, ain't it? Got a letter from my wife this aft'noon," he chuckled. "She says she hopes I'm doin' well. Sally'd have a fit if she knew what business I was goin' into. Well, time's getting along—"

"I brung the money," said Mr. Gubb, drawing it from his pocket.

"Don't seem hardly necess'ry, does it?" said Mr. Critz mildly. "But I s'pose it's just as well. Thankee, Mister Gubb. I'll just pile into my coat—"

Mr. Gubb had picked up the gold-brick, and now he let it fall. Once more the door flew open, but this time it opened for three stalwart policemen, whose revolvers pointed unwaveringly at Mr. Critz. The plump little man gave one glance, and put up his hands.

"All right, boys, you've got me," he said in quite an-

other voice, and allowed them to seize his arms. He paid no attention to the police, but at Mr. Gubb, who was tearing the wrapper from what proved to be but a common vitrified paving-brick, he looked long and hard.

"Say," said Mr. Critz to Mr. Gubb, "I'm the goat. You stung *me* all right. You worked me to a finish. I thought I knew all of you from Burns down, but you're a new one to me. Who are you, anyway?"

Mr. Gubb looked up.

"Me?" he said with pride. "Why—why—I'm Gubb, the foremost deteckative of Riverbank, Iowa."

# ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

## PHILO GUBB'S GREATEST CASE

PHILO GUBB, wrapped in his bathrobe, went to the door of the room that was the headquarters of his business of paper-hanging and decorating as well as the office of his detective business, and opened the door a crack. It was still early in the morning, but Mr. Gubb was a modest man, and, lest any one should see him in his scanty attire, he peered through the crack of the door before he stepped hastily into the hall and captured his copy of the "Riverbank Daily Eagle." When he had secured the still damp newspaper, he returned to his cot bed and spread himself out to read comfortably.

It was a hot Iowa morning. Business was so slack that if Mr. Gubb had not taken out his set of eight varieties of false whiskers daily and brushed them carefully, the moths would have been able to devour them at leisure.

P. Gubb opened the "Eagle." The first words that met his eye caused him to sit upright on his cot. At the top of the first column of the first page were the headlines.

MYSTERIOUS DEATH Of HENRY SMITZ

Body Found In Mississippi River By Boatman Early This A.M.

Foul Play Suspected

Mr. Gubb unfolded the paper and read the item under the headlines with the most intense interest. Foul play meant the possibility of an opportunity to put to use

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once more the precepts of the Course of Twelve Lessons, and with them fresh in his mind Detective Gubb was eager to undertake the solution of any mystery that Riverbank could furnish. This was the article:—

Just as we go to press we receive word through Policeman Michael O'Toole that the well-known mussel-dredger and boatman, Samuel Fliggis (Long Sam), while dredging for mussels last night just below the bridge, recovered the body of Henry Smitz, late of this place.

Mr. Smitz had been missing for three days and his wife had been greatly worried. Mr. Brownson, of the Brownson Packing Company, by whom he was employed, admitted that Mr. Smitz had been missing for several days.

The body was found sewed in a sack. Foul play is suspected.

"I should think foul play would be suspected," exclaimed Philo Gubb, "if a man was sewed into a bag and deposited into the Mississippi River until dead."

He propped the paper against the foot of the cot bed and was still reading when some one knocked on his door. He wrapped his bathrobe carefully about him and opened the door. A young woman with tear-dimmed eyes stood in the doorway.

"Mr. P. Gubb?" she asked. "I'm sorry to disturb you so early in the morning, Mr. Gubb, but I could n't sleep all night. I came on a matter of business, as you might say. There's a couple of things I want you to do."

"Paper-hanging or deteckating?" asked P. Gubb.

"Both," said the young woman. "My name is Smitz—Emily Smitz. My husband—"

"I'm aware of the knowledge of your loss, ma'am," said the paper-hanger detective gently.

"Lots of people know of it," said Mrs. Smitz. "I guess everybody knows of it—I told the police to try to find Henry, so it is no secret. And I want you to come up as soon as you get dressed, and paper my bedroom."

Mr. Gubb looked at the young woman as if he thought she had gone insane under the burden of her woe.

"And then I want you to find Henry," she said, "because I've heard you can do so well in the detecting line."

Mr. Gubb suddenly realized that the poor creature did not yet know the full extent of her loss. He gazed down upon her with pity in his bird-like eyes.

"I know you'll think it strange," the young woman went on, "that I should ask you to paper a bedroom first, when my husband is lost; but if he is gone it is because I was a mean, stubborn thing. We never quarreled in our lives, Mr. Gubb, until I picked out the wall-paper for our bedroom, and Henry said parrots and birds-of-paradise and tropical flowers that were as big as umbrellas would look awful on our bedroom wall. So I said he had n't anything but Low Dutch taste, and he got mad. 'All right, have it your own way,' he said, and I went and had Mr. Skaggs put the paper on the wall, and the next day Henry did n't come home at all.

"If I'd thought Henry would take it that way, I'd rather had the wall bare, Mr. Gubb. I've cried and cried, and last night I made up my mind it was all my fault and that when Henry came home he'd find a decent paper on the wall. I don't mind telling you, Mr. Gubb, that when the paper was on the wall it looked worse than it looked in the roll. It looked crazy."

"Yes'm," said Mr. Gubb, "it often does. But, however, there's something you'd ought to know right away about Henry."

The young woman stared wide-eyed at Mr. Gubb for a moment; she turned as white as her shirtwaist.

"Henry is dead!" she cried, and collapsed into Mr. Gubb's long, thin arms.

Mr. Gubb, the inert form of the young woman in his arms, glanced around with a startled gaze. He stood miserably, not knowing what to do, when suddenly he saw Policeman O'Toole coming toward him down the hall. Policeman O'Toole was leading by the arm a man whose wrists bore clanking handcuffs.

"What's this now?" asked the policeman none too gently, as he saw the bathrobed Mr. Gubb holding the fainting woman in his arms.

"I am exceedingly glad you have come," said Mr. Gubb. "The only meaning into it, is that this is Mrs. H. Smitz, widow-lady, fainted onto me against my will and wishes."

"I was only askin'," said Policeman O'Toole politely enough.

"You should n't ask such things until you're asked to ask," said Mr. Gubb.

After looking into Mr. Gubb's room to see that there was no easy means of escape, O'Toole pushed his prisoner into the room and took the limp form of Mrs. Smitz from Mr. Gubb, who entered the room and closed the door.

"I may as well say what I want to say right now," said the handcuffed man as soon as he was alone with Mr. Gubb. "I've heard of Detective Gubb, off and on, many a time, and as soon as I got into this trouble I said, 'Gubb's the man that can get me out if any one can.' My name is Herman Wiggins."

"Glad to meet you," said Mr. Gubb, slipping his long legs into his trousers.

"And I give you my word for what it is worth," continued Mr. Wiggins, "that I'm as innocent of this crime as the babe unborn."

"What crime?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"Why, killing Hen Smitz—what crime did you think?" said Mr. Wiggins. "Do I look like a man that would go and murder a man just because—"

He hesitated and Mr. Gubb, who was slipping his suspenders over his bony shoulders, looked at Mr. Wiggins with keen eyes.

"Well, just because him and me had words in fun," said Mr. Wiggins, "I leave it to you, can't a man say words in fun once in a while?"

"Certainly sure," said Mr. Gubb.

"I guess so," said Mr. Wiggins. "Anybody'd know a man don't mean all he says. When I went and told Hen

Smitz I'd murder him as sure as green apples grow on a tree, I was just fooling. But this fool policeman—"

"Mr. O'Toole?"

"Yes. They gave him this Hen Smitz case to look into, and the first thing he did was to arrest me for murder. Nervy, I call it."

Policeman O'Toole opened the door a crack and peeked in. Seeing Mr. Gubb well along in his dressing operations, he opened the door wider and assisted Mrs. Smitz to a chair. She was still limp, but she was a brave little woman and was trying to control her sobs.

"Through?" O'Toole asked Wiggins. "If you are, come along back to jail."

"Now, don't talk to me in that tone of voice," said Mr. Wiggins angrily. "No, I'm not through. You don't know how to treat a gentleman like a gentleman, and never did."

He turned to Mr. Gubb.

"The long and short of it is this: I'm arrested for the murder of Hen Smitz, and I did n't murder him and I want you to take my case and get me out of jail."

"Ah, stuff!" exclaimed O'Toole. "You murdered him and you know you did. What's the use talkin'?"

Mrs. Smitz leaned forward in her chair.

"Murdered Henry?" she cried. "He never murdered Henry. I murdered him."

"Now, ma'am," said O'Toole politely, "I hate to contradict a lady, but you never murdered him at all. This man here murdered him, and I've got the proof on him."

"I murdered him!" cried Mrs. Smitz again. "I drove him out of his right mind and made him kill himself."

"Nothing of the sort," declared O'Toole. "This man Wiggins murdered him."

"I did not!" exclaimed Mr. Wiggins indignantly. "Some other man did it."

It seemed a deadlock, for each was quite positive. Mr. Gubb looked from one to the other doubtfully.

"All right, take me back to jail," said Mr. Wiggins. "You look up the case, Mr. Gubb; that's all I came here for. Will you do it? Dig into it, hey?"

"I most certainly shall be glad to so do," said Mr. Gubb, "at the regular terms."

O'Toole led his prisoner away.

For a few minutes Mrs. Smitz sat silent, her hands clasped, staring at the floor. Then she looked up into Mr. Gubb's eyes.

"You will work on this case, Mr. Gubb, won't you?" she begged. "I have a little money—I'll give it all to have you do your best. It is cruel—cruel to have that poor man suffer under the charge of murder when I know so well Henry killed himself because I was cross with him. You can prove he killed himself—that it was my fault. You will?"

"The way the deteckative profession operates onto a case," said Mr. Gubb, "is n't to go to work to prove anything particularly especial. It finds a clue or clues and follows them to where they lead to. That I shall be willing to do."

"That is all I could ask," said Mrs. Smitz gratefully.

Arising from her seat with difficulty, she walked tremblingly to the door. Mr. Gubb assisted her down the stairs, and it was not until she was gone that he remembered that she did not know the body of her husband had been found—sewed in a sack and at the bottom of the river. Young husbands have been known to quarrel with their wives over matters as trivial as bedroom wall-paper; they have even been known to leave home for several days at a time when angry; in extreme cases they have even been known to seek death at their own hands; but it is not at all usual for a young husband to leave home for several days and then in cold blood sew himself in a sack and jump into the river. In the first place there are easier ways of terminating one's life; in the second place a man can jump into the river with perfect ease without going to the trouble of sewing himself in a sack; and in the third place it is exceedingly difficult for a man to sew himself into a sack. It is almost impossible.

To sew himself into a sack a man must have no little skill, and he must have a large, roomy sack. He takes, let

us say, a sack-needle, threaded with a good length of twine; he steps into the sack and pulls it up over his head; he then reaches above his head, holding the mouth of the sack together with one hand while he sews with the other hand. In hot anger this would be quite impossible.

Philo Gubb thought of all this as he looked through his disguises, selecting one suitable for the work he had in hand. He had just decided that the most appropriate disguise would be "Number 13, Undertaker," and had picked up the close black wig, and long, drooping mustache, when he had another thought. Given a bag sufficiently loose to permit free motion of the hands and arms, and a man, even in hot anger, might sew himself in. A man, intent on suicidally bagging himself, would sew the mouth of the bag shut and would then cut a slit in the front of the bag large enough to crawl into. He would then crawl into the bag and sew up the slit, which would be immediately in front of his hands. It could be done! Philo Gubb chose from his wardrobe a black frock coat and a silk hat with a wide band of crape. He carefully locked his door and went down to the street.

On a day as hot as this day promised to be, a frock coat and a silk hat could be nothing but distressingly uncomfortable. Between his door and the corner, eight various citizens spoke to Philo Gubb, calling him by name. In fact, Riverbank was as accustomed to seeing P. Gubb in disguise as out of disguise, and while a few children might be interested by the sight of Detective Gubb in disguise, the older citizens thought no more of it, as a rule, than of seeing Banker Jennings appear in a pink shirt one day and a blue striped one the next. No one ever accused Banker Jennings of trying to hide his identity by a change of shirts, and no one imagined that P. Gubb was trying to disguise himself when he put on a disguise. They considered it a mere business custom, just as a butcher tied on a white apron before he went behind his counter.

This was why, instead of wondering who the tall, dark-

garbed stranger might be, Banker Jennings greeted Philo cheerfully.

"Ah, Gubb!" he said. "So you are going to work on this Smitz case, are you? Glad of it, and wish you luck. Hope you place the crime on the right man and get him the full penalty. Let me tell you there's nothing in this rumor of Smitz being short of money. We did lend him money, but we never pressed him for it. We never even asked him for interest. I told him a dozen times he could have as much more from us as he wanted, within reason, whenever he wanted it, and that he could pay me when his invention was on the market."

"No report of news of any such rumor has as yet come to my hearing," said P. Gubb, "but since you mention it, I'll take it for less than it is worth."

"And that's less than nothing," said the banker. "Have you any clue?"

"I'm on my way to find one at the present moment of time," said Mr. Gubb.

"Well, let me give you a pointer," said the banker. "Get a line on Herman Wiggins or some of his crew, understand? Don't say I said a word,—I don't want to be brought into this,—but Smitz was afraid of Wiggins and his crew. He told me so. He said Wiggins had threatened to murder him."

"Mr. Wiggins is at present in the custody of the county jail for killing H. Smitz with intent to murder him," said Mr. Gubb.

"Oh, then—then it's all settled," said the banker. "They've proved it on him. I thought they would. Well, I suppose you've got to do your little bit of detecting just the same. Got to air the camphor out of the false hair, eh?"

The banker waved a cheerful hand at P. Gubb and passed into his banking institution.

Detective Gubb, cordially greeted by his many friends and admirers, passed on down the main street, and by the time he reached the street that led to the river he was followed by a large and growing group in-

tent on the pleasant occupation of watching a detective detect.

As Mr. Gubb walked toward the river, other citizens joined the group, but all kept a respectful distance behind him. When Mr. Gubb reached River Street and his false mustache fell off, the interest of the audience stopped short three paces behind him and stood until he had rescued the mustache and once more placed its wires in his nostrils. Then, when he moved forward again, they too moved forward. Never, perhaps, in the history of crime was a detective favored with a more respectful gallery.

On the edge of the river, Mr. Gubb found Long Sam Fliggis, the mussel dredger, seated on an empty tar-barrel with his own audience ranged before him listening while he told, for the fortieth time, the story of his finding of the body of H. Smitz. As Philo Gubb approached, Long Sam ceased speaking, and his audience and Mr. Gubb's gallery merged into one great circle which respectfully looked and listened while Mr. Gubb questioned the mussel dredger.

"Suicide?" said Long Sam scoffingly. "Why, he wan't no more a suicide than I am right now. He was murdered or wan't nothin'! I've dredged up some suicides in my day, and some of 'em had stones tied to 'em, to make sure they'd sink, and some thought they'd sink without no ballast, but nary one of 'em ever sewed himself into a bag, and I give my word," he said positively, "that Hen Smitz could n't have sewed himself into that burlap bag unless some one done the sewing. Then the feller that did it was an assistant-suicide, and the way I look at it is that an assistant-suicide is jest the same as a murderer."

The crowd murmured approval, but Mr. Gubb held up his hand for silence.

"In certain kinds of burlap bags it is possibly probable a man could sew himself into it," said Mr. Gubb, and the crowd, seeing the logic of the remark, applauded gently but feelingly.

"You ain't seen the way he was sewed up," said Long Sam. "or you would n't talk like that."

"I have n't yet took a look," admitted Mr. Gubb, "but I aim so to do immediately after I find a clue onto which to work up my case. An A-1 deteckative can't set forth to work until he has a clue, that being a rule of the game."

"What kind of a clue was you lookin' for?" asked Long Sam. "What's a clue, anyway?"

"A clue," said P. Gubb, "is almost anything connected with the late lamented, but generally something that nobody but a deteckative would think had anything to do with anything whatsoever. Not infrequently often it is a button."

"Well, I've got no button except them that is sewed onto me," said Long Sam, "but if this here sack-needle will do any good—"

He brought from his pocket the point of a heavy sack-needle and laid it in Philo Gubb's palm. Mr. Gubb looked at it carefully. In the eye of the needle still remained a few inches of twine.

"I cut that off'n the burlap he was sewed up in," volunteered Long Sam, "I thought I'd keep it as a sort of nice little souvenir. I'd like it back again when you don't need it for a clue no more."

"Certainly sure," agreed Mr. Gubb, and he examined the needle carefully.

There are two kinds of sack-needles in general use. In both, the point of the needle is curved to facilitate pushing it into and out of a closely filled sack; in both, the curved portion is somewhat flattened so that the thumb and finger may secure a firm grasp to pull the needle through; but in one style the eye is at the end of the shaft while in the other it is near the point. This needle was like neither; the eye was midway of the shaft; the needle was pointed at each end and the curved portions were not flattened. Mr. Gubb noticed another thing—the twine was not the ordinary loosely twisted hemp twine, but a hard, smooth cotton cord, like carpet warp.

"Thank you," said Mr. Gubb, "and now I will go elsewhere to investigate to a further extent, and it is not

necessarily imperative that everybody should accompany along with me if they don't want to."

But everybody did want to, it seemed. Long Sam and his audience joined Mr. Gubb's gallery and, with a dozen or so newcomers, they followed Mr. Gubb at a decent distance as he walked toward the plant of the Brownson Packing Company, which stood on the riverbank some two blocks away.

It was here Henry Smitz had worked. Six or eight buildings of various sizes, the largest of which stood immediately on the river's edge, together with the "yards" or pens, all enclosed by a high board fence, constituted the plant of the packing company, and as Mr. Gubb appeared at the gate the watchman there stood aside to let him enter.

"Good-morning, Mr. Gubb," he said pleasantly. "I been sort of expecting you. Always right on the job when there's crime being done, ain't you? You'll find Merkel and Brill and Jokosky and the rest of Wiggins's crew in the main building, and I guess they'll tell you just what they told the police. They hate it, but what else can they say? It's the truth."

"What is the truth?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"That Wiggins was dead sore at Hen Smitz," said the watchman. "That Wiggins told Hen he'd do for him if he lost them their jobs like he said he would. That's the truth."

Mr. Gubb—his admiring followers were halted at the gate by the watchman—entered the large building and inquired his way to Mr. Wiggins's department. He found it on the side of the building toward the river and on the ground floor. On one side the vast room led into the refrigerating room of the company; on the other it opened upon a long but narrow dock that ran the width of the building.

Along the outer edge of the dock were tied two barges, and into these barges some of Wiggins's crew were dumping mutton—not legs of mutton but entire sheep, neatly sewed in burlap. The large room was the packing and

shipping room, and the work of Wiggins's crew was that of sewing the slaughtered and refrigerated sheep carcasses in burlap for shipment. Bales of burlap stood against one wall; strands of hemp twine ready for the needle hung from pegs in the wall and the posts that supported the floor above. The contiguity of the refrigerating room gave the room a pleasantly cool atmosphere.

Mr. Gubb glanced sharply around. Here was the burlap, here were needles, here was twine. Yonder was the river into which Hen Smitz had been thrown. He glanced across the narrow dock at the blue river. As his eye returned he noticed one of the men carefully sweeping the dock with a broom—sweeping fragments of glass into the river. As the men in the room watched him curiously, Mr. Gubb picked up a piece of burlap and put it in his pocket, wrapped a strand of twine around his finger and pocketed the twine, examined the needles stuck in improvised needle-holders made by boring gimlet holes in the wall, and then walked to the dock and picked up one of the pieces of glass.

"Clues," he remarked, and gave his attention to the work of questioning the men.

Although manifestly reluctant, they honestly admitted that Wiggins had more than once threatened Hen Smitz—that he hated Hen Smitz with the hatred of a man who has been threatened with the loss of his job. Mr. Gubb learned that Hen Smitz had been the foreman for the entire building—a sort of autocrat with, as Wiggins's crew informed him, an easy job. He had only to see that the crews in the building turned out more work this year than they did last year. " 'Ficiency" had been his motto, they said, and they hated " 'Ficiency."

Mr. Gubb's gallery was awaiting him at the gate, and its members were in a heated discussion as to what Mr. Gubb had been doing. They ceased at once when he appeared and fell in behind him as he walked away from the packing house and toward the undertaking establishment of Mr. Holworthy Bartman, on the main street. Here, joining the curious group already assembled, the gallery

was forced to wait while Mr. Gubb entered. His task was an unpleasant but necessary one. He must visit the little "morgue" at the back of Mr. Bartman's establishment.

The body of poor Hen Smitz had not yet been removed from the bag in which it had been found, and it was to the bag Mr. Gubb gave his closest attention. The bag—in order that the body might be identified—had not been ripped, but had been cut, and not a stitch had been severed. It did not take Mr. Gubb a moment to see that Hen Smitz had not been sewed in a bag at all. He had been sewed in burlap—burlap "yard goods," to use a shopkeeper's term—and it was burlap identical with that used by Mr. Wiggins and his crew. It was no loose bag of burlap—but a close-fitting wrapping of burlap; a cocoon of burlap that had been drawn tight around the body, as burlap is drawn tight around the carcass of sheep for shipment, like a mummy's wrappings.

It would have been utterly impossible for Hen Smitz to have sewed himself into the casing, not only because it bound his arms tight to his sides, but because the burlap was lapped over and sewed from the outside. This, once and for all, ended the suicide theory. The question was: Who was the murderer?

As Philo Gubb turned away from the bier, Undertaker Bartman entered the morgue.

"The crowd outside is getting impatient, Mr. Gubb," he said in his soft, undertakery voice. "It is getting on toward their lunch hour, and they want to crowd into my front office to find out what you've learned. I'm afraid they'll break my plate-glass windows, they're pushing so hard against them. I don't want to hurry you, but if you would go out and tell them Wiggins is the murderer they'll go away. Of course there's no doubt about Wiggins being the murderer, since he has admitted he asked the stockkeeper for the electric-light bulb."

"What bulb?" asked Philo Gubb.

"The electric-light bulb we found sewed inside this burlap when we sliced it open," said Bartman. "Matter of fact, we found it in Hen's hand. O'Toole took it for a clue

and I guess it fixes the murder on Wiggins beyond all doubt. The stock-keeper says Wiggins got it from him."

"And what does Wiggins remark on that subject?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"Not a word," said Bartman. "His lawyer told him not to open his mouth, and he won't. Listen to that crowd out there!"

"I will attend to that crowd right presently," said P. Gubb, sternly. "What I should wish to know now is why Mister Wiggins went and sewed an electric-light bulb in with the corpse for."

"In the first place," said Mr. Bartman, "he did n't sew it in with any corpse, because Hen Smitz was n't a corpse when he was sewed in that burlap, unless Wiggins drowned him first, for Dr. Mortimer says Hen Smitz died of drowning; and in the second place, if you had a live man to sew in burlap, and had to hold him while you sewed him, you'd be liable to sew anything in with him.

"My idea is that Wiggins and some of his crew jumped on Hen Smitz and threw him down, and some of them held him while the others sewed him in. My idea is that Wiggins got that electric-light bulb to replace one that had burned out, and that he met Hen Smitz and had words with him, and they clinched, and Hen Smitz grabbed the bulb, and then the others came, and they sewed him into the burlap and dumped him into the river.

"So all you've got to do is to go out and tell that crowd that Wiggins did it and that you'll let them know who helped him as soon as you find out. And you better do it before they break my windows."

Detective Gubb turned and went out of the morgue. As he left the undertaker's establishment the crowd gave a slight cheer, but Mr. Gubb walked hurriedly toward the jail. He found Policeman O'Toole there and questioned him about the bulb; and O'Toole, proud to be the center of so large and interested a gathering of his fellow citizens, pulled the bulb from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Gubb, while he repeated in more detail the facts given by Mr. Bartman. Mr. Gubb looked at the bulb.

"I presume to suppose," he said, "that Mr. Wiggins asked the stock-keeper for a new bulb to replace one that was burned out?"

"You're right," said O'Toole. "Why?"

"For the reason that this bulb is a burned-out bulb," said Mr. Gubb.

And so it was. The inner surface of the bulb was darkened slightly, and the filament of carbon was severed. O'Toole took the bulb and examined it curiously.

"That's odd, ain't it?" he said.

"It might so seem to the non-deteckative mind," said Mr. Gubb, "but to the deteckative mind, nothing is odd."

"No, no, this ain't so odd, either," said O'Toole, "for whether Hen Smitz grabbed the bulb before Wiggins changed the new one for the old one, or after he changed it, don't make so much difference, when you come to think of it."

"To the deteckative mind," said Mr. Gubb, "it makes the difference that this ain't the bulb you thought it was, and hence consequently it ain't the bulb Mister Wiggins got from the stock-keeper."

Mr. Gubb started away. The crowd followed him. He did not go in search of the original bulb at once. He returned first to his room, where he changed his undertaker disguise for Number Six, that of a blue woolen-shirted laboring-man with a long brown beard. Then he led the way back to the packing house.

Again the crowd was halted at the gate, but again P. Gubb passed inside, and he found the stock-keeper eating his luncheon out of a tin pail. The stock-keeper was perfectly willing to talk.

"It was like this," said the stock-keeper. "We've been working overtime in some departments down here, and Wiggins and his crew had to work overtime the night Hen Smitz was murdered. Hen and Wiggins was at outs, or anyway I heard Hen tell Wiggins he'd better be hunting another job because he wouldn't have this one long, and Wiggins told Hen that if he lost his job he'd murder him—Wiggins would murder Hen, that is. I didn't think

it was much of anything but loose talk at the time. But Hen was working overtime, too. He'd been working nights up in that little room of his on the second floor for quite some time, and this night Wiggins come to me and he says Hen had asked him for a fresh thirty-two-candle-power bulb. So I give it to Wiggins, and then I went home. And, come to find out, Wiggins sewed that bulb up with Hen."

"Perhaps maybe you have sack-needles like this into your stock-room," said P. Gubb, producing the needle Long Sam had given him. The stock-keeper took the needle and examined it carefully.

"Never had any like that," he said.

"Now, if," said Philo Gubb,—"if the bulb that was sewed up into the burlap with Henry Smitz was n't a new bulb, and if Mr. Wiggins had given the new bulb to Henry, and if Henry had changed the new bulb for an old one, where would he have changed it at?"

"Up in his room, where he was always tinkering at that machine of his," said the stock-keeper.

"Could I have the pleasure of taking a look into that there room for a moment of time?" asked Mr. Gubb.

The stock-keeper arose, returned the remnants of his luncheon to his dinner-pail and led the way up the stairs. He opened the door of the room Henry Smitz had used as a work-room, and P. Gubb walked in. The room was in some confusion, but, except in one or two particulars, no more than a workroom is apt to be. A rather cumbrous machine—the invention on which Henry Smitz had been working—stood as the murdered man had left it, all its levers, wheels, arms, and cogs intact. A chair, tipped over, lay on the floor. A roll of burlap stood on a roller by the machine. Looking up, Mr. Gubb saw, on the ceiling, the lighting fixture of the room, and in it was a clean, shining thirty-two-candle-power bulb. Where another similar bulb might have been in the other socket was a plug from which an insulated wire, evidently to furnish power, ran to the small motor connected with the machine on which Henry Smitz had been working.

The stock-keeper was the first to speak.

"Hello!" he said. "Somebody broke that window!" And it was true. Somebody had not only broken the window, but had broken every pane and the sash itself. But Mr. Gubb was not interested in this. He was gazing at the electric bulb and thinking of Part Two, Lesson Six of the Course of Twelve Lessons—"How to Identify by Finger-Prints, with General Remarks on the Bertillon System." He looked about for some means of reaching the bulb above his head. His eye lit on the fallen chair. By placing the chair upright and placing one foot on the frame of Henry Smitz's machine and the other on the chair-back, he could reach the bulb. He righted the chair and stepped onto its seat. He put one foot on the frame of Henry Smitz's machine; very carefully he put the other foot on the top of the chair-back. He reached upward and unscrewed the bulb.

The stock-keeper saw the chair totter. He sprang forward to steady it, but he was too late. Philo Gubb, grasping the air, fell on the broad, level board that formed the middle part of Henry Smitz's machine.

The effect was instantaneous. The cogs and wheels of the machine began to revolve rapidly. Two strong, steel arms flopped down and held Detective Gubb to the table, clamping his arms to his side. The roll of burlap unrolled, and as it unrolled, the loose end was seized and slipped under Mr. Gubb and wrapped around him and drawn taut, bundling him as a sheep's carcass is bundled. An arm reached down and back and forth, with a sewing motion, and passed from Mr. Gubb's head to his feet. As it reached his feet a knife sliced the burlap in which he was wrapped from the burlap on the roll.

And then a most surprising thing happened. As if the board on which he lay had been a catapult, it suddenly and unexpectedly raised Philo Gubb and tossed him through the open window. The stock-keeper heard a muffled scream and then a great splash, but when he ran to the window, the great paper-hanger detective had disappeared in the bosom of the Mississippi.

Like Henry Smitz he had tried to reach the ceiling by standing on the chair-back; like Henry Smitz he had fallen upon the newly invented burlaping and loading machine; like Henry Smitz he had been wrapped and thrown through the window into the river; but, unlike Henry Smitz, he had not been sewn into the burlap, because Philo Gubb had the double-pointed shuttle-action needle in his pocket.

Page Seventeen of Lesson Eleven of the Rising Sun Detective Agency's Correspondence School of Detecting's Course of Twelve Lessons, says:—

In cases of extreme difficulty of solution it is well for the detective to reënact as nearly as possible the probable action of the crime.

Mr. Philo Gubb had done so. He had also proved that a man may be sewn in a sack and drowned in a river without committing willful suicide or being the victim of foul play.

# ANTHONY BERKELEY

## THE AVENGING CHANCE

When he was able to review it in perspective Roger Sheringham was inclined to think that the Poisoned Chocolates Case, as the papers called it, was perhaps the most perfectly planned murder he had ever encountered. The motive was so obvious, when you knew where to look for it—but you didn't know; the method was so significant, when you had grasped its real essentials—but you didn't grasp them; the traces were so thinly covered, when you had realised what was covering them—but you didn't realize. But for the merest piece of bad luck, which the murderer could not possibly have foreseen, the crime must have been added to the classical list of great mysteries.

This was the story of the case, as Chief Inspector Moresby told it one evening to Roger in the latter's rooms in the Albany a week or so later. Or rather, this is the raw material of Moresby's story as it passed through the crucible of Roger's vivid imagination:

On Friday morning, the fifteenth of November, at half-past ten in the morning, Graham Beresford walked into his Club in Piccadilly, the very exclusive Rainbow Club, and asked for his letters. The porter handed him one and a couple of circulars. Beresford walked over to the fireplace in the big lounge hall to open them.

While he was doing so, a few minutes later, another member entered the Club, a Sir William Anstruther, who lived in rooms just round the corner in Berkeley Street and spent most of his time at The Rainbow. The porter glanced at the clock, as he always did when Sir William entered, and, as always, it was exactly half-past ten to the

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minute. The time was thus definitely fixed by the porter beyond all doubt. There were three letters for Sir William and a small parcel, and he also strolled over to the fireplace, nodding to Beresford but not speaking to him. The two men only knew each other very slightly, and had probably never exchanged more than a dozen words in all.

Having glanced through his letters Sir William opened the parcel and, after a moment, snorted with disgust. Beresford looked at him, and Sir William thrust out a letter which had been enclosed in the parcel, with an uncomplimentary remark upon modern trade methods. Concealing a smile (Sir William's ways were a matter of some amusement to his fellow-members), Beresford read the letter. It was from a big firm of chocolate manufacturers, Mason & Sons, and set forth that they were putting on the market a new brand of liqueur chocolates designed especially to appeal to men; would Sir William do them the honour of accepting the enclosed two-pound box and letting the firm have his candid opinion on them?

"Do they think I'm a blank chorus-girl?" fumed Sir William. "Write 'em testimonials about their blank chocolates, indeed! Blank 'em! I'll complain to the blank Committee. That sort of blank thing can't blank well be allowed here." Sir William, it will be gathered, was a choleric man.

"Well, it's an ill wind so far as I'm concerned," Beresford soothed him. "It's reminded me of something. My wife and I had a box at the Imperial last night and I bet her a box of chocolates to a hundred cigarettes that she wouldn't spot the villain by the end of the second act. She won. I must remember to get them. Have you seen it, by the way—*The Creaking Skull?* Not a bad show."

"Not likely," growled Sir William, unsoothed. "I've got something better to do than sit and watch a lot of fools with phosphorescent paint on their faces shooting off silly pop-guns at each other. Got to get a box of chocolates, did you say? Well, take this blank one. I don't want it."

For a moment Beresford demurred politely and then, most unfortunately for himself, accepted. The money so saved meant nothing to him, for he was a wealthy man; but trouble was always worth saving.

By an extraordinarily lucky chance neither the outer wrapper of the box nor its covering letter were thrown into the fire, and this was the more fortunate in that both men had tossed the envelopes of their letters into the flames. Sir William did, indeed, make a bundle of wrapper, letter and string, but he handed it over to Beresford with the box and the latter simply dropped it inside the fender. This bundle the porter subsequently extracted and, being a man of orderly habits, put it tidily away in the waste-paper basket, whence it was retrieved later by the police. The bundle, it may be said at once, comprised two out of the only three material clues to the murder, the third of course being the chocolates themselves.

Of the three unconscious protagonists in the impending tragedy, Sir William was without doubt the most remarkable. Still a year or two under fifty he looked, with his flaming red face and thick-set figure, a typical country squire of the old school, and both his manners and his language were in accordance with tradition. There were other resemblances too, but always with a difference. The country squires of the old school hunted, and so did Sir William. But the squires only hunted foxes; Sir William was more catholic. Sir William, in short, was no doubt a thoroughly bad baronet. But there was nothing mean about him. His vices, like such virtues as he had, were all on the large scale. And the result, as usual, was that most other men, good or bad, liked him well enough (except a husband here and there, or a father or two) and women openly hung on his husky words.

In comparison with him Beresford was rather an ordinary man, a tall, dark, not unhandsome fellow of two-and-thirty, quiet and reserved; popular in a way but neither inviting nor apparently reciprocating anything beyond a rather grave friendliness. His father had left him a rich man, but idleness did not appeal to him. He

had inherited enough of the parental energy and drive not to allow his money to lie softly in gilt-edged securities and had a finger in a good many business pies, out of sheer love of the game.

Money attracts money. Graham Beresford had inherited it, he made it, and, inevitably, he had married it too. The daughter of a late ship-owner in Liverpool, with not far off half-a-million in her own right. That half-million might have made some poor man incredibly happy for life, but she had chosen to bring it to Beresford, who needed it not at all. But the money was incidental, for he needed her and would have married her just as inevitably (said his friends) if she had not had a farthing.

She was so exactly his type. A tall, rather serious-minded, highly-cultured girl, not so young that her character had not had time to form (she was twenty-five when Beresford married her, three years ago), she was the ideal wife for him. A bit of a Puritan, perhaps, in some ways, but Beresford, whose wild oats though duly sown had been a sparse crop, was ready enough to be a Puritan himself by that time, if she was. To make no bones about it, the Beresfords succeeded in achieving that eighth wonder of the modern world, a happy marriage.

And into the middle of it there dropped, with irretrievable tragedy, the box of chocolates.

Beresford gave them to her after lunch as they sat over their coffee, with some jesting remark about paying his honourable debts, and she opened the box at once. Beresford, who did not believe in spoiling good coffee, refused when she offered them to him and his wife ate the first one alone. As she did so she exclaimed in surprise that the filling seemed exceedingly strong and positively burnt her mouth.

Beresford explained that they were samples of a new brand and then, made curious by what his wife had said, took one too. A burning taste, not intolerable but much too strong to be pleasant, followed the release of the liquid, and the almond flavouring seemed quite exces-

sive. "By Jove," he said, "they are strong. They must be filled with neat alcohol."

"Oh, they wouldn't do that, surely," said his wife, taking another. "But they are very strong. I think I rather like them, though."

Beresford ate another, and disliked it still more. "I don't," he said with decision. "They make my tongue feel quite numb. I shouldn't eat any more of them if I were you. I think there's something wrong with them."

"Well, they're only an experiment, I suppose." she said. "But they do burn. I'm not sure whether I like them or not."

A few minutes later Beresford went out to keep a business appointment in the city. He left her still trying to make up her mind whether she liked them, and still eating them to decide. Beresford remembered that scrap of conversation afterwards very vividly, because it was the last time he saw his wife alive.

That was roughly half-past two. At a quarter to four Beresford arrived at his Club from the City in a taxi, in a state of collapse. He was helped into the building by the driver and the porter, and both described him subsequently as pale to the point of ghastliness, with staring eyes and livid lips, and his skin damp and clammy. His mind seemed unaffected, however, and when they had got him up the steps he was able to walk, with the porter's help, into the lounge.

The porter, thoroughly alarmed, wanted to send for a doctor at once, but Beresford, who was the last man in the world to make a fuss, refused to let him, saying that it must be indigestion and he would be all right in a few minutes. To Sir William Anstruther, however, who was in the lounge at the time, he added after the porter had gone: "Yes, and I believe it was those infernal chocolates you gave me, now I come to think of it. I thought there was something funny about them at the time. I'd better go and find out if my wife—" He broke off abruptly. His body, which had been leaning back limply in his chair, suddenly heaved rigidly upright; his jaws locked together, the livid

lips drawn back in a horrible grin, and his hands clenched on the arms of his chair. At the same time Sir William became aware of an unmistakable smell of bitter almonds.

Believing that the man was dying under his eyes, Sir William raised an alarmed shout for the porter and a doctor. The other occupants of the lounge hurried up, and between them they got the convulsed body of the unconscious man into a more comfortable position. Before the doctor could arrive a telephone message was received at the club from an agitated butler asking if Mr. Beresford was there, and if so would he come home at once as Mrs. Beresford had been taken seriously ill. As a matter of fact she was already dead.

Beresford did not die. He had taken less of the poison than his wife, who after his departure must have eaten at least three more of the chocolates, so that its action in his case was less rapid and the doctor had time to save him. Not that the latter knew then what the poison was. He treated him chiefly for prussic acid poisoning, on the strength of the smell of bitter almonds, but he wasn't sure and threw in one or two other things as well. Anyhow it turned out in the end that he could not have had a fatal dose, and by about eight o'clock that night he was conscious; the next day he was practically convalescent. As for the unfortunate Mrs. Beresford, her doctor arrived too late to save her and she passed away very rapidly in a deep coma.

The police had taken the matter in hand as soon as Mrs. Beresford's death was reported to them and the fact of poison established, and it was only a very short time before things had become narrowed down to the chocolates as the active agent. Sir William was interrogated, the letter and wrapper were recovered from the waste-paper basket, and, even before the sick man was out of danger, a Detective-Inspector was asking for an interview just before closing-time with the manager-director of Mason & Sons. Scotland Yard moves quickly.

It was the police theory at this stage, based on what Sir William and two doctors had been able to tell them,

that by an act of criminal carelessness on the part of one of Mason's employees, an excessive amount of oil of bitter almonds had been included in the filling mixture of the chocolates, for that was what the doctors had decided must be the poisoning ingredient. Oil of bitter almonds is used a good deal, in the cheaper kinds of confectionery, as a flavouring. However, the managing-director quashed this idea at once. Oil of bitter almonds, he asserted, was never used by Mason's.

He had more interesting news still. Having read with undisguised astonishment the covering letter, he at once declared that it was a forgery. No such letter, no such samples had been sent out by the firm at all; a new variety of liqueur-chocolates had never even been mooted. The fatal chocolates were their ordinary brand. Unwrapping and examining one more closely, he called the Inspector's attention to a mark on the underside, which he suggested was the remains of a small hole drilled in the case through which the liquid could have been extracted and the fatal filling inserted, the hole afterwards being stopped up with softened chocolate, a perfectly simple operation.

The Inspector agreed. It was now clear to him that somebody had been trying deliberately to murder Sir William Anstruther.

Scotland Yard doubled its activities. The chocolates were sent for analysis, Sir William was interviewed again, and so was the now conscious Beresford. From the latter the doctor insisted that the news of his wife's death must be kept till the next day, as in his weakened condition the shock might be fatal, so that nothing very helpful was obtained from him.

Nor could Sir William, now thoroughly alarmed, throw any light on the mystery or produce a single person who might have any grounds for trying to kill him. He was living apart from his wife, who was the principal beneficiary in his will, but she was in the south of France, as the French police subsequently confirmed. His estate in Worcestershire, heavily mortgaged, was entailed and went

to a nephew; but as the rent he got for it barely covered the interest on the mortgage, and the nephew was considerably better off than Sir William himself, there was no motive there. The police were at a dead end.

The analysis brought one or two interesting facts to light. Not oil of bitter almonds but nitro-benzine, a kindred substance, chiefly used in the manufacture of aniline dyes, was the poison employed. Each chocolate in the upper layer contained exactly six minims of it, in a mixture of Kirsch and Maraschino. The chocolates in the lower layers were harmless.

As to the other clues, they seemed equally useless. The sheet of Mason's notepaper was identified by Merton's, the printers, as of their work, but there was nothing to show how it had got into the murderer's possession. All that could be said was that, the edges being distinctly yellowed, it must be an old piece. The machine on which the letter had been typed of course could not be traced. From the wrapper, a piece of ordinary brown paper with Sir William's address hand-printed on it in large capitals, there was nothing to be learned at all beyond that the parcel had been posted at the office in Southampton Street between the hours of eight-thirty and nine o'clock on the previous evening.

Only one thing was quite clear. Whoever had coveted Sir William's life had no intention of paying for it with his or her own.

"And now you know as much as we do, Mr. Sheringham," concluded Chief Inspector Moresby; "and if you can say who sent those chocolates to Sir William, you'll know a good deal more."

Roger nodded thoughtfully. "It's a brute of a case. The field of possible suspects is so wide. It might have been anyone. What about feminine jealousy? There's a parallel in the Christina Edmunds case. And Sir William's private life doesn't seem to be immaculate. I daresay there's a good deal of off with the old light-o'-love and on with the new. What about investigations round that idea?"

"Why, that's just what I have been doing, Mr. Sheringham, sir," retorted Chief Inspector Moresby reproachfully. "That was the first thing that came to me. Because if anything does stand out about this business it is that it's a woman's crime. Nobody but a woman would send poisoned chocolates to a man. Another man would never think of it."

"That's a very sound point, Moresby," Roger meditated. "Very sound indeed. And Sir William couldn't help you?"

"Couldn't," said Moresby, not without a trace of resentment, "or wouldn't. I was inclined to believe at first that he might have his suspicions and was shielding some woman. But I don't know. There may be nothing in it."

"On the other hand, there may be quite a lot. As I feel the case at present, that's where the truth lies."

Moresby looked as if a little solid evidence would be more to his liking than any amount of feelings about the case. They ruminated in silence.

"But why in the name of goodness," asked Roger suddenly, "nitro-benzine?"

"There, Mr. Sheringham," Moresby admitted, "you've got me. I never even knew it was so poisonous. And the analyst was surprized too. It's never reckoned among the ordinary poisons. I suppose she used it because it's so easy to get hold of."

"Humph!" Roger did not seem so sure. "It is reminiscent, this case, isn't it? I see another parallel besides Christina Edmunds."

"And that is?"

"Why, Sir William Horwood. You remember that some lunatic sent poisoned chocolates not so long ago to the Commissioner of Police himself. A good crime always gets imitated. One could bear in mind the possibility that this is a copy of the Horwood case."

Moresby brightened. "It's funny you should say that, Mr. Sheringham, because that's the very conclusion I've come to. I've tested every other theory, and so far as I know there's not a soul with an interest in Sir William's death, whether from motives of gain, revenge or what you

like, whom I haven't had to rule quite out of it. In fact, if Sir William isn't shielding someone (and I'm almost sure that he isn't), I've pretty well made up my mind that the person who sent those chocolates was some irresponsible lunatic of a woman, a social or religious fanatic who's probably never even seen him. And if that's the case," Moresby sighed, "a fat chance I have of ever laying hands on her."

"Unless Chance steps in, as it so often does," said Roger brightly, "and helps you. A tremendous lot of cases get solved by a stroke of sheer luck, don't they? *Chance the Avenger*. It would make an excellent film-title. But there's a lot of truth in it. If I were superstitious, which I'm not, I should say it wasn't chance at all, but Providence avenging the victim."

"Well, Mr. Sheringham," said Moresby, who was not superstitious either, "to tell the truth I don't mind what it is, so long as it lets me get my hands on the right person."

If Moresby had paid his visit to Roger Sheringham with any hope of tapping that gentleman's brains, he went away disappointed. Rack them as he might, Roger had been unable to throw any effective light on the affair.

To tell the truth Roger was inclined to agree with the Chief Inspector's conclusion, that the attempt on the life of Sir William Anstruther and the actual murder of the unfortunate Mrs. Beresford must be laid to the account of some irresponsible criminal lunatic, actuated by a religious or social fanaticism. For this reason, although he thought about it a good deal during the next few days, he made no attempt to take the case in hand. It was the sort of affair, necessitating endless enquiries that a private person would have neither the time nor the authority to carry out, which can only be handled by the official police. Roger's interest in it was purely academic.

It was hazard, two chance encounters, which translated this interest from the academic to the personal.

The first was at the Rainbow Club itself. Roger was

lunching there with a member, and inevitably the conversation turned on the recent tragedy. Roger's host was inclined to plume himself on the fact that he had been at school with Beresford and so had a more intimate connection with the affair than his fellow-members. One gathered, indeed, that the connection was a trifle closer even than Sir William's. Roger's host was that kind of man.

"And just as it happened I saw the Beresfords in their box at the Imperial that night. Noticed them before the curtain went up for the first act. I had a stall. I may even have seen them making that fatal bet." Roger's host took on an even more portentous aspect. One gathered that it was by no means improbably due to his presence in the stalls that the disastrous bet was made at all.

As they were talking a man entered the dining-room and walked past their table. Roger's host became abruptly silent. The newcomer threw him a slight nod and passed on. The other leant forward across the table.

"Talk of the devil! That was Beresford himself. First time I've seen him in here since it happened. Poor devil! It knocked him all to pieces, you know. I've never seen a man so devoted to his wife. Did you notice how ghastly he looked?" All this in a hushed, tactful whisper, that would have been far more obvious to the subject of it, had he happened to have been looking their way, than the loudest shouts.

Roger nodded shortly. He had caught a glimpse of Beresford's face and been shocked by it even before he learned his identity. It was haggard and pale and seamed with lines of bitterness, prematurely old. "Hang it all," he now thought, much moved, "Moresby really must make an effort. If the murderer isn't found soon it'll kill that chap too."

He said aloud, somewhat at random and certainly without tact: "He didn't exactly fall on your neck. I thought you two were such bosom friends?"

His host looked uncomfortable. "Oh, well, you must make allowances, just at present," he hedged. "Besides, we weren't *bosom* friends exactly. As a matter of fact he

was a year or two senior to me. Or it might even have been three. We were in different houses, too. And he was on the modern side of course, while I was a classical bird."

"I see," said Roger, quite gravely, realising that his host's actual contact with Beresford at school had been limited.

He left it at that.

The next encounter took place the following morning. Roger was in Bond Street, about to go through the distressing ordeal of buying a new hat. Along the pavement he suddenly saw bearing down on him Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming. Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming was small, exquisite, rich and a widow, and she sat at Roger's feet whenever he gave her the opportunity. But she talked. She talked, in fact, and talked, and talked. And Roger, who rather like talking himself, could not bear it. He tried to dart across the road, but there was no opening in the stream. He was cornered.

Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming fastened on him gladly. "Oh, Mr. Sheringham! *Just* the person I wanted to see. Mr. Sheringham, *do* tell me. In confidence. Are you taking up this dreadful business of *poor* Joan Beresford's death? Oh, don't—*don't* tell me you're not!" Roger was trying to do so, but she gave him no chance. "It's too dreadful. You must—you simply *must* find out who sent those chocolates to that dreadful Sir William Anstruther. *Are* you going to?"

Roger, the frozen and imbecile grin of civilised intercourse on his face, again tried to get a word in; without result.

"I was horrified when I heard of it—simply horrified. You see, Joan and I were such *very* close friends. Quite intimate. We were at school together.—Did you say anything, Mr. Sheringham?"

Roger, who had allowed a faint groan to escape him, hastily shook his head.

"And the awful thing, the truly *terrible* thing is that Joan brought the whole business on herself. Isn't that *appalling?*"

Roger no longer wanted to escape. "What did you say?" he managed to insert, incredulously.

"I suppose it's what they call tragic irony. Certainly it was tragic enough, and I've never heard anything so terribly ironical. You know about that bet she made with her husband of course, so that he had to get her a box of chocolates, and if he hadn't, Sir William would never have given him the poisoned ones and he'd have eaten them and died himself, and good riddance? Well, Mr. Sheringham—" Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming lowered her voice to a conspirator's whisper and glanced about her in the approved manner. "I've never told anybody else this, but I'm telling you because I know you'll appreciate it. You're interested in irony, aren't you?"

"I adore it," Roger said mechanically. "Yes?"

"Well—*Joan wasn't playing fair!*"

"How do you mean?" Roger asked, bewildered.

Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming was artlessly pleased with her sensation. "Why, she'd seen the play before. We went together, the very first week it was on. She *knew* who the villain was all the time."

"By Jove!" Roger was as impressed as Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming could have wished. "Chance the Avenger, with a vengeance. We're none of us immune from it."

"Poetic justice, you mean?" twittered Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming, to whom these remarks had been somewhat obscure. "Yes, it was, wasn't it? Though really, the punishment was out of all proportion to the crime. Good gracious, if every woman who cheats over a bet is to be killed for it, where would any of us be?" demanded Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming with unconscious frankness.

"Umph!" said Roger, tactfully.

"But Joan Beresford! That's the extraordinary thing. I should never have thought Joan *would* do a thing like that. She was such a *nice* girl. A little close with money, of course, considering how well-off they were, but that isn't anything. Of course it was only fun, and pulling her husband's leg, but I always used to think Joan was

such a *serious* girl, Mr. Sheringham. I mean, ordinary people don't talk about honour, and truth, and playing the game, and all those things one takes for granted. But Joan did. She was always saying that this wasn't honourable, or that wouldn't be playing the game. Well, she paid herself for not playing the game, poor girl, didn't she? Still, it all goes to show the truth of the old saying, doesn't it?"

"What old saying?" said Roger, hypnotised by this flow.

"Why, that still waters run deep. Joan must have been deep, I'm afraid." Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming sighed. It was evidently a social error to be deep. "I mean, she certainly took me in. She can't have been quite so honourable and truthful as she was always pretending, can she? And I can't help wondering whether a girl who'd deceive her husband in a little thing like that might not —oh, well, I don't want to say anything against poor Joan now she's dead, poor darling, but she can't have been *quite* such a plaster saint after all, can she? I mean," said Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming, in hasty extenuation of these suggestions, "I do think psychology is so *very* interesting, don't you, Mr. Sheringham?"

"Sometimes, very," Roger agreed gravely. "But you mentioned Sir William Anstruther just now. Do you know him, too?"

"I used to," Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming replied, with much airiness. "Horrible man! Always running after some woman or other. And when he's tired of her, just drops her—biff!—like that. At least," added Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming somewhat hastily, "so I've heard."

"And what happens if she refuses to be dropped?"

"Oh, dear, I'm sure I don't know. I suppose you've heard the latest?" Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming hurried on, perhaps a trifle more pink than the delicate aids to nature on her cheeks would have warranted. "He's taken up with that Bryce woman now. You know, the wife of the oil man, or petrol, or whatever he made his money in. It began about three weeks ago. You'd have thought that

dreadful business of being responsible, in a way, for poor Joan Beresford's death would have sobered him up a little, wouldn't you? But not a bit of it; he—"

"I suppose Sir William knew Mrs. Beresford pretty well?" Roger remarked casually.

Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming stared at him. "Sir William? No, he didn't know Joan at all. I'm sure he didn't. I've never heard her mention him."

Roger shot off on another tack. "What a pity you weren't at the Imperial with the Beresfords that evening. She'd never have made that bet if you had been." Roger looked extremely innocent. "You weren't, I suppose?"

"I?" queried Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming in surprise. "Good gracious, no. I was at the new revue at the Pavilion. Lady Cavelstoke had a box and asked me to join her party."

"Oh, yes. Good show, isn't it? I thought that sketch *The Sempiternal Triangle* very clever. Didn't you?"

*"The Sempiternal Triangle?"* wavered Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming.

"Yes, in the first half."

"Oh! Then I didn't see it. I got there disgracefully late, I'm afraid. But then," said Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming with pathos, "I always do seem to be late for simply everything."

Once more Roger changed the subject. "By the way, I wonder if you've got a photograph of Mrs. Beresford?" he asked carelessly.

"Of Joan? Yes, I have. Why, Mr. Sheringham?"

"You haven't got one of Sir William too, by any chance?" said Roger, still more carelessly.

The pink on Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming's cheeks deepened half a shade. "I—I think I have. Yes, I'm almost sure I have. But—"

"Would you lend them to me some time?" Roger asked, with a mysterious air, and looked around him with a frown in the approved manner.

"Oh, Mr. Sheringham! Yes, of course I will. You mean

—you mean you *are* going to find out who sent those chocolates to Sir William?"

Roger nodded, and put his finger to his lips. "Yes. You've guessed it. But not a word, Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming. Oh, excuse me, there's a man on that 'bus who wants to speak to me. *Scotland Yard,"* he hissed in an impressive whisper. "Good-bye." He dived for a passing 'bus and clung on with difficulty. With awful stealth he climbed up the steps and took his seat, after an exaggerated scrutiny of the other passengers, beside a perfectly inoffensive man in a bowler-hat. The man in the bowler-hat, who happened to be a clerk in the employment of a builders' merchant, looked at him resentfully: there were plenty of quite empty seats all round them.

Roger bought no new hat that morning.

For probably the first time in her life Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming had given somebody a constructive idea.

Roger made good his opportunity. Getting off the 'bus at the corner of Bond Street and Oxford Street, he hailed a taxi and gave Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming's address. He thought it better to take advantage of her permission at a time when he would not have to pay for it a second time over.

The parlourmaid seemed to think there was nothing odd in his mission, and took him up to the drawing-room at once. A corner of the room was devoted to the silver framed photographs of Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming's friends, and there were many of them. Roger, who had never seen Sir William in the flesh, had to seek the parlourmaid's help. The girl, like her mistress, was inclined to be loquacious, and to prevent either of them getting ideas into their heads which might be better not there, he removed from their frames not one photograph but five, those of Sir William, Mrs. Beresford, Beresford himself, and two strange males who appeared to belong to the Sir William period of Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming's collection. Finally he obtained a likeness of Mrs. Verreker-le-

Flemming herself and added that to his collection. Roger like confusing his trail.

For the rest of the day he was very busy.

His activities would have no doubt seemed to Mrs. Verreker-le-Flemming not merely baffling but pointless. He paid a visit to a public library, for instance, and consulted a work of reference, after which he took a taxi and drove to the offices of the Anglo-Eastern Perfumery Company, where he enquired for a certain Mr. Joseph Lea Hardwick and seemed much put out on hearing that no such gentleman was known to the firm and was certainly not employed in any of their numerous branches. Many questions had to be put about the firm and its branches before he consented to abandon the quest. After that he drove to Messrs. Weall & Wilson, the well-known institution which protects the trade interests of individuals and advises its subscribers regarding investments. Here he entered his name as a subscriber, and explaining that he had a large sum of money to invest, filled in one of the special enquiry forms which are headed Strictly Confidential.

Then he went to the Rainbow Club, in Piccadilly.

Introducing himself to the porter without a blush as connected with Scotland Yard, he asked the man a number of questions, more or less trivial, concerning the tragedy. "Sir William, I understand," he said finally, as if by the way, "did not dine here the evening before?"

There it appeared that Roger was wrong. Sir William had dined in the club, as he did about three times a week.

"But I quite understood he wasn't here that evening?" Roger said plaintively.

The porter was emphatic. He remembered quite well. So did a waiter, whom the porter summoned to corroborate him. Sir William had dined, rather late, and had not left the dining-room till about nine o'clock. He spent the evening there too, the waiter knew, or at least some of it, for he himself had taken him a whiskey-and-soda in the lounge not less than half-an-hour later.

Roger retired.

He retired to Merton's, in a taxi.

It seemed that he wanted some new notepaper printed, of a very special kind, and to the young woman behind the counter he specified at great length and in wearisome detail exactly what he did want. The young woman handed him the book of specimen pieces and asked him to see if there was any style there which would suit him. Roger glanced through it, remarking garrulously to the young woman that he had been recommended to Merton's by a very dear friend, whose photograph he happened to have on him at that moment. Wasn't that a curious coincidence? The young woman agreed that it was.

"About a fortnight ago, I think my friend was in here last," said Roger, producing the photograph. "Recognise this?"

The young woman took the photograph, without apparent interest. "Oh, yes. I remember. About some notepaper too, wasn't it? So that's your friend. Well, it's a small world. Now this is a line we're selling a good deal of just now."

Roger went back to his rooms to dine. Afterwards, feeling restless, he wandered out of the Albany and turned down Piccadilly. He wandered round the Circus, thinking hard, and paused for a moment out of habit to inspect the photographs of the new revue hung outside the Pavilion. The next thing he realized was that he had got as far as Jermyn Street and was standing outside the Imperial Theatre. Glancing at the advertisements of *The Creaking Skull* he saw that it began at half-past eight, and his watch told him that the time was twenty-nine minutes past that hour. He had an evening to get through somehow. He went inside.

The next morning, very early for Roger, he called on Moresby at Scotland Yard.

"Morseby," he said without preamble, "I want you to do something for me. Can you find me a taximan who took a fare from Piccadilly Circus or its neighbourhood at about ten past nine on the evening before the Beresford crime, to the Strand somewhere near the bottom of South-

ampton Street, and another who took a fare back between those points. I'm not sure about the first. Or one taxi might have been used for the double journey, but I doubt that. Anyhow, try to find out for me, will you?"

"What are you up to now, Mr. Sheringham?" Moresby asked suspiciously.

"Breaking down an interesting alibi," replied Roger serenely. "By the way, I know who sent those chocolates to Sir William. I'm just building up a nice structure of evidence for you. Ring up my rooms when you've got those taximen."

He strolled out, leaving Moresby positively gaping after him. Roger had his annoying moments.

The rest of the day he spent apparently trying a buy a secondhand typewriter. He was very particular that it should be a Hamilton No. 4. When the shop-people tried to induce him to consider other makes he refused to look at them, saying that he had had the Hamilton No. 4 so strongly recommended to him by a friend, who had bought one about three weeks ago. Perhaps it was at this very shop? No? They hadn't sold a Hamilton No. 4 for the last three months? How odd.

But at one shop they had sold a Hamilton No. 4 within the last month, and that was odder still.

At half-past four Roger got back to his rooms to await the telephone-message from Moresby. At half-past five it came.

"There are fourteen taxi-drivers here, littering up my office," said Moresby offensively. "They all took fares from the Strand to Piccadilly circus at your time. What do you want me to do with 'em, Mr. Sheringham?"

"Keep them till I come, Chief Inspector," returned Roger with dignity, and grabbed his hat.

The interview with the fourteen was brief enough, however. To each grinning man (Roger deduced a little heavy humour on the part of Moresby before his arrival) he showed in turn a photograph, holding it so that Moresby could not see it, and asked if he could recognise his

fare. The ninth man did so, without hesitation. At a nod from Roger Moresby dismissed the others.

"How dressed?" Roger asked the man laconically, tucking the photograph away in his pocket.

"Evening togs," replied the other, equally laconic.

Roger took a note of his name and sent him away with a ten-shilling tip. "The case," he said to Moresby, "is at an end."

Moresby sat at his table and tried to look official. "And now Mr. Sheringham, sir, perhaps you'll tell me what you've been doing."

"Certainly, Moresby: your work for you," Roger said blandly, seating himself on the table and swinging his legs. As he did so, a photograph fell unnoticed out of his pocket and fluttered, face downwards, under the table. Moresby eyed it but did not pick it up. "I really have solved the thing, you know. Here's the evidence for you." He took from his note-case an old letter and handed it to the Chief Inspector. "Look at the slightly crooked s's and the chipped capital H."

Moresby studied it for a moment, then drew the forged letter from a drawer of his table and compared the two minutely. "Where did you get hold of this?" he asked soberly.

"In a secondhand typewriter shop in St. Martin's Lane. The machine was sold to an unknown customer about a month ago. They identified the customer from that same photograph. As it happened, this machine had been used for a time in the office after it was repaired, to see that it was O. K., and I easily got hold of that specimen of its work."

"And where is the machine now?"

"Oh, at the bottom of the Thames, I expect," Roger smiled. "I tell you, this criminal takes no unnecessary chances. But that doesn't matter. There's your evidence."

"Humph! It's all right so far as it goes," conceded Moresby. "But what about Mason's paper?"

"That," said Roger calmly, "was extracted from Merton's book of sample notepapers, as I'd guessed from the

very yellowed edges might be the case. I can prove contact of the criminal with the book, and there is a gap which will certainly turn out to have been filled by that piece of paper."

"That's fine," Moresby said more heartily.

"As for that taximan, the criminal had an alibi. You've heard it broken down. Between ten past nine and twenty-five past, in fact during the time when the parcel must have been posted, the murderer took a hurried journey to that neighborhood, going probably by 'bus or underground, but returning, as I expected, by taxi, because time would be getting short."

"And the murderer, Mr. Sheringham?"

"The person whose photograph is in my pocket," Roger said unkindly. "By the way, do you remember what I was saying the other day about Chance the Avenger, my excellent film-title? Well, it's worked again. By a chance meeting in Bond Street with a silly woman I was put, by the merest accident, in possession of a piece of information which showed me then and there who had sent those chocolates addressed to Sir William. There were other possibilities of course, and I tested them, but then and there on the pavement I saw the whole thing, from first to last."

"Who *was* the murderer, then?" repeated Moresby.

"It was so beautifully planned," Roger went on dreamily. "We were taken in completely. We never grasped for one moment that we were making the fundamental mistake that the murderer all along intended us to make."

In spite of his impatience Moresby obliged. "And what was that?"

"Why, that the plan had miscarried. That the wrong person had been killed. That was just the beauty of it. The plan had *not* miscarried. It had been brilliantly successful. The wrong person was *not* killed. Very much the right person was."

Moresby gaped. "Why, how on earth do you make that out, sir?"

"Mrs. Beresford was the objective all the time. That's why the plot was so ingenious. Everything was anticipated. It was perfectly natural that Sir William should hand the chocolates over to Beresford. It was foreseen that we should look for the criminal among Sir William's associates and not the dead woman's. It was probably even foreseen that the crime would be considered the work of a woman; whereas really, of course, chocolates were employed because it was a woman who was the objective. Brilliant!"

Moresby, unable to wait any longer, snatched up the photograph and gazed at it incredulously. He whistled. "Good heavens! But Mr. Sheringham, you don't mean to tell me that. . . . Sir William himself!"

"He wanted to get rid of Mrs. Beresford," Roger continued, gazing dreamily at his swinging feet. "He'd liked her well enough at the beginning, no doubt, though it was her money he was after all the time. But she must have bored him dreadfully very soon. She was really never his type at all.

"But the real trouble was that she was too close with her money. She sentenced herself to death there. He wanted it, or some of it, pretty badly; and she wouldn't part. There's no doubt about the motive. I made a list of his firms and got a report on them. They're all rocky and need money to save them. He'd got through all his own, and he had to get more. Nobody seems to have gathered it, but he's a rotten business-man. And half-a-million!

"As for the nitro-benzine, that was simple enough. I looked it up and found that besides the uses you told me, it's largely used in perfumery. And he's got a perfumery business. The Anglo-Eastern Perfumery Company. That's how he'd know about it being poisonous of course. But I shouldn't think he got his supply from there. He'd be cleverer than that. He probably made the stuff himself. I know that he has at any rate an elementary knowledge of chemistry (at least, he was on the modern side at Selchester) and it's the simplest operation. Any school-

boy knows how to treat benzol with nitric acid to get nitro-benzine."

"But," stammered Moresby, "but Sir William. . . . He was at Eton."

"Sir William?" said Roger sharply. "Who's talking about Sir William? I told you the photograph of the murderer was in my pocket." He whipped out the photograph in question and confronted the astounded Chief Inspector with it. "Beresford, man! Beresford's the murderer, of his own wife." Roger studied the other's dumbfounded face and smiled secretly. He felt avenged now for the heavy humour with the taximen.

"Beresford," he went on more mildly, "didn't want his wife but did want her money. He contrived this plot, providing, as he thought, against every contingency that could possibly arise. He established a mild alibi, if suspicion ever should arise, by taking his wife to the Imperial, and slipped out of the theatre at the first interval. (I sat through the first act of the dreadful thing myself last night to see when the interval came.) Then he hurried down to the Strand, posted his parcel, and took a taxi back. He had ten minutes, but nobody was going to remark if he got back to the box a minute or two late; you may be able to find that he did.

"And the rest simply followed. He knew Sir William came to the Club every morning at ten-thirty, as regularly as clockwork; he knew that for a psychological certainty he could get the chocolates handed over to him if he hinted for them; he knew that the police would go chasing after all sorts of false trails starting from Sir William. And as for the wrapper and the forged letter, he carefully didn't destroy them because they were calculated not only to divert suspicion but actually to point away from him to some anonymous lunatic. Which is exactly what they did."

"Well, it's very smart of you, Mr. Sheringham," Moresby said, with a little sigh but quite ungrudgingly. "Very smart indeed. By the way, what was it the lady told you in Bond Street?"

"Why, it wasn't so much what she actually told me as what I heard between her words, so to speak. What she told me was that Mrs. Beresford knew the answer to that bet; what I deduced was that, being the sort of person she was, it was quite incredible that Mrs. Beresford should have made a bet to which she knew the answer. *Ergo,* she didn't. *Ergo,* there never was such a bet. *Ergo,* Beresford was lying. *Ergo,* Beresford wanted to get hold of those chocolates for some reason other than he stated. And there was only one other reason.

"After all, we only had Beresford's word for the bet, didn't we? And only his word for the conversation in the drawing-room. Of course he wouldn't have left her till he'd seen her take, or somehow made her take, at least six of the chocolates, more than a lethal dose. That's why the stuff was in those meticulous six-minim doses. And so that he could take a couple himself, of course. A clever stroke, that. Took us all in again. Though of course he exaggerated his symptoms considerably."

Moresby rose to his feet. "Well, Mr. Sheringham, I'm much obliged to you, sir. And now I shall have to get busy myself." He scratched his head. "Chance the Avenger, eh? Well, I can tell you one pretty big thing Beresford left to Chance the Avenger, Mr. Sheringham. Suppose Sir William hadn't handed over the chocolates after all? Supposing he'd kept 'em, to give to one of his own ladies? That was a nasty risk to take."

Roger positively snorted. He felt a personal pride in Beresford by this time, and it distressed him to hear a great man so maligned.

"Really, Moresby! It wouldn't have had any serious results if Sir William had. Do give my man credit for being what he is. You don't imagine he sent the poisoned ones to Sir William, do you? Of course not! He'd send harmless ones, and exchange them for the others on his way home. Dash it all, he wouldn't go right out of his way to present opportunities to Chance.

"If," added Roger, "Chance really is the right word."

# BEN AMES WILLIAMS

## THE CIGARET

THIS story should properly be dedicated to Tim O'Hearn, since it is the record of the first appearance of that strange talent of his—that gift for seeing beneath the surface of things; that ability to stand in the background like a piece of furniture, so little regarded that men forgot he was there, while he read their minds! Worth some attention, this Tim O'Hearn.

But the tale more properly concerns itself with the affairs of Dr. Ralph Hounder—and the cigaret he smoked and laid aside.

That he should have come into possession of the pistol at all was a stroke of good fortune; he had some inkling of this at the time. He was in the north woods with a guide who was also a game warden; they stopped one day at a squatter's shack in a clearing where once had roared a lumber camp, and Dr. Hounder's guide went indoors to question the squatter.

Dr. Hounder, staying outside, was surprised to see the pistol drop from an open window at his very feet. He picked it up and saw a cheap weapon, .38 caliber, with a barrel from which the nickel had chipped off and a handle of which half had cracked away. He smiled a little, imagining the squatter must have had some reason for wishing to be rid of the thing, and dropped it into his pocket. Later that day the whimsical thought occurred to him that if he ever wished to commit a murder, this would be a useful possession, this nameless pistol from a nameless source. Dr. Hounder knew that murderers had in the past been traced by the weapon they used. He kept

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the pistol; had kept it ever since. He was a bachelor, and there was no woman in his house to discover it and throw it gingerly away. The original cartridges were still in the cylinder. He fired the thing one day, and was interested in the discovery that the report was not loud; was no more than a flat, snapping crack. He kept the pistol locked away in a steel box. His personal and private pharmacopœia was also kept in the box. The pistol was not the doctor's only secret.

The mistake he made would never have been made but for this other secret of his. Some slight difficulty in replenishing his supplies of the drug he desired had left his nerves in an uncertain and jangling state.

Then Dr. David Mills called him in consultation on Mrs. Farraday, and they agreed upon a dosage which—Dr. Mills having departed and the nurse being delayed elsewhere—Dr. Hounder administered. His hand shook a little, in the measuring, and Mrs. Farraday died before morning.

Her death had not been unexpected; the poor lady had been ill for weeks, and she was old and ready to die. Nevertheless it was a shocking thing for Dr. Hounder. As soon as he realized his mistake, he had, of course, taken his precautions; her death might have been expected in the natural course of events without that mistake of his, and there was no reason to suspect him of mistakes. Dr. Hounder, by the time the body was buried and the danger of an examination was past, had decided that he was safe from discovery. And then, three or four days after the obsequies, James Farraday sent for him.

Farraday and his wife were old; they had had no children, and they lived very much alone in a great house surrounded by pleasant hedged grounds, where an old servant or two attended them. Farraday was wealthy; it was understood that his death would profit certain worthy institutions. There was certainly no reason to suppose that it would in any wise profit Dr. Ralph Hounder. This was the strength of his position, as he saw it after his call in response to Mr. Farraday's summons.

That summons itself had startled him; the reason for it was at first even more startling. It appeared Mr. Farraday had conceived the idea that his wife's death need not have occurred. "Not yet at least, Dr. Hounder," he explained. "You understand that I know she was very ill; and she and I are both old—" He amended himself, smiling pitifully. "Were both old," he said, and continued: "But I saw no sign of an approaching crisis in her on the day of her death, and her more serious attacks were usually preceded by indications which I could see. I may say that her death was a shock to me." The old man's feeble eyes filled with tears. "My grief prevented clear thought at first; I have sought to think more clearly. It seems to me possible that Dr. Mills made a mistake in his prescription."

Dr. Hounder heard this with an inaudible sigh of relief; the tension of his nerves and muscles relaxed. He said diplomatically: "It is possible you are right, sir. I am inclined to doubt it. Dr. Mills is very careful. We agreed on the course of treatment, he and I, before he left the house that day. I remained to talk with your wife for a little, a few minutes, until the nurse should return."

"I appreciate all you did, Dr. Hounder," Mr. Farraday assured him. "I have no thought of blaming you."

Dr. Hounder bowed. "That is very generous of you, sir."

"But somebody's to blame," said Mr. Farraday, a little heatedly. "Somebody's to blame. Or maybe no one is. That's what distresses me now, sir. Not knowing whether any one is to be blamed or no."

"When our loved ones leave us," Dr. Hounder suggested, "we are too apt to accuse ourselves, too apt to think we have been remiss, or careless, or have done less than we might. We should not thus distress ourselves." Dr. Hounder's tones were reassuring.

The old man had the stubbornness of age. "You are right, of course," he assented. "I know that I am unreasonable." He smiled placatingly. "Yet I am unreasonable, and determinedly so. I wish to be sure, in this matter, Dr. Hounder. I sent for you to ask a simple thing. Would you

object to my seeking an order to exhume and examine—my wife's body?"

Dr. Hounder found himself replying, in the suave tones long habit had taught him, that he would not object in the least; at the same time a suddenly awakened devil of panic in him was objecting very violently indeed.

Even while he reassured Mr. Farraday, consenting and applauding the wisdom of his plan, his thoughts were bent on that scene by Mrs. Farraday's bedside, scarce a week before. Already the scene was in his mind distorted; even at this short distance he could not be sure what had happened. His nerves had been all awry. The old woman was near death, anyway. Why so much bother? He saw quite clearly that if Mr. Farraday went ahead with this plan of his, it meant ruin for Dr. Ralph Hounder, the fashionable practitioner.

". . . Write the letter," he heard himself saying to Mr. Farraday. "I suggest that you write it tonight, and I will call tomorrow morning and consult with you on its terms—before dispatching it. May I suggest that the matter be kept between us two? In the meantime I will consult with Dr. Mills."

Mr. Farraday objected to that; and Dr. Hounder argued the point automatically, his words not mirroring his thoughts at all. He yielded at last; and at about the same time reached his own decision. When he left Mr. Farraday and turned homeward, he was committed, in his thoughts, to murder. . . .

His plans were laid with scientific accuracy and with artistic simplicity. The ordinary doctor, he told himself, if he decided on murder, would choose a drug. The very use of the pistol was, he felt, a stroke of genius on his part. He sat late that night, considering the project, until there awoke in him a certain zeal for it.

He knew something of the Farraday menage; knew the routine of the great house. It stood at the corner of two intersecting streets, in a neighborhood not much frequented, and the house itself was near the sidewalk. Mr. Farraday was accustomed to receive callers in his big

living-room on the ground floor; he had a desk there Behind his chair, in the huge fireplace, a small fire burned even when the days were warm. "The old fool's cold-blooded as a snake," thought Dr. Hounder. French windows opened on the veranda; there was a mail-box at the corner, not six steps from the veranda rail. It was secured to a post set in the hedge that surrounded the grounds. Dr. Hounder took care to visualize this mail-box in his mind; it had a part in what he meant to do. Mr. Farraday's man servant was an old man, and, like Mr. Farraday himself, somewhat hard of hearing.

Another thing worth remembering Dr. Hounder reminded himself. He closed his eyes and visualized the living-room where he would see Mr. Farraday tomorrow morning—the door in a side wall, opposite the windows; the desk table where Mr. Farraday would be sitting; the fireplace, half a dozen feet away; the book-shelves along the wall. He weighed his plan and all his movements with some care. Only one thing needful to his success; this one thing easily managed—that the servant should be elsewhere at the moment when he, Dr. Hounder, entered Mr. Farraday's living-room.

When his plans were complete he sought out a small cardboard box of a fit size to hold the pistol; he cut out one end of this box and laid the piece of cardboard aside. Then the box itself he wrapped in stout paper and tied three ways with cord, leaving the open end free. The paper at that end he did not fold. Loose ends of the cord dangled. He tested this device to be sure it was practical; practiced inserting the pistol, adjusting the cardboard end of the box, folding the paper and tying the final knot, until his fingers moved like mechanism. Satisfied with his skill in this maneuver, he tried another—wrapped the pistol in a handkerchief and placed it in his right-hand coat pocket; sneezed, drew out handkerchief and pistol as though to blow his nose—and went through a pantomime of pulling the trigger.

There were other movements he considered and rehearsed, alone there in his office till late in the night, and

at times he talked to himself in low and contented tones. When he was satisfied with every detail, he went to bed and dozed himself to sleep.

In the morning, as a final touch, he addressed the box which would contain the pistol to John R. Hands, 23½ A Street, Lancaster, Cal. The name Lancaster he got from a map; the rest was fiction. He then weighed it, the revolver inside, and affixed the proper stamps.

About half-past nine he stepped into his car and drove toward the home of Mr. Farraday. When he approached the house he drove more slowly, passed, turned at some distance and returned; passed again. He thus waited without being conspicuous until he saw a man go in at the Farraday entrance. Thus assured that Mr. Farraday would, on his own arrival, be engaged, he drove boldly up to the house, stopped his car, got out, went up the steps, and rang. The pistol was in his right-hand pocket, wrapped up in a handkerchief; the cardboard box was in his physician's bag.

If he had personally stage-managed what followed, matters could not have gone more to his fancy. The old serving-man admitted him, told him that Mr. Farraday was engaged, and suggested that he wait in the small music-room across the hall from the living-room. Dr. Hounder told the man he need not return. "I'll just knock and go in when his caller goes," he explained, and the old fellow nodded and went mumbling toward the rear of the house.

Dr. Hounder settled himself to wait. His nerves were shaky, but he knew a remedy for that and applied it. Thereafter his senses became more alert, attuned; he listened acutely to the sounds that came from the closed room across the hall: low voices—sometimes rising—and once with a faint suggestion of heat. Farraday must, on occasion, be an irascible old man, the doctor thought.

By the by the caller departed. Mr. Farraday permitted him to find his own way to the front door, himself staying in the living-room, with the door open. It appeared he had not heard Dr. Hounder's arrival. After an interval the

physician rose, his bag in his hand, crossed the hall, and stood in the doorway.

Mr. Farraday said: "Ah, good morning, Dr. Hounder." He did not rise, and he apologized for the omission. "My old legs are a thought infirm," he explained.

Dr. Hounder reassured him. "Don't think of it, sir. Sit still." He closed the door, deposited his bag on a chair, and approached the desk. "Well, have you written?"

"I've the letter right here," Mr. Farraday replied, and drew it from his pocket. Dr. Hounder sneezed. "You've taken cold," Mr. Farraday suggested with solicitude.

The physician shook his head; at the same time, from his right-hand coat pocket and in the most matter-of-fact way, he drew a handkerchief. The folds of the handkerchief and the fact that the pistol muzzle almost touched Mr. Farraday's head muffled the explosion. Mr. Farraday tilted forward across his desk with a little thump, cured of all worldly cares and ills.

Dr. Hounder wasted no time. He laid the pistol down upon the edge of the desk and reached for the letter. Mr. Farraday's hand still clutched it; chance had it that the thing had fallen just beneath his head. Dr. Hounder instantly perceived that unless it were snatched away, there would be a damningly clean space upon the blotter where it had lain. He had it in his hand within a split second; was reassured to see that the sharp edge of the stain on the blotter was already being marred and blotted out. . . . Yet this might not be the right letter; he opened it, made sure. Into the fire. It flared there.

While he watched it burn he picked up the pistol and handkerchief, and cleaned his hand with the latter. The letter was crisping into ash. He turned toward his bag, found the cardboard box, thrust into it pistol and handkerchief, and with half a dozen swift motions closed the end and tied it.

By the time the knot was tied he stood at one of the French windows. No one was visible without. The window opened easily; he stepped lightly across the lawn and reached over the hedge and laid the parcel,

stamped and addressed, atop the mail-box to await the collector. Instantly back into the living-room again, he crossed, picked up his bag, and opened the door into the hall.

These movements occupied him, since he first entered the living-room, a scant sixty-second's time. Now he dropped his bag and ran along the hall toward the rear of the house, shouting for the serving-man. There was very realistic consternation in his tones. . . .

Dr. Hounder himself telephoned the police and volunteered to await their arrival. He was at the house when Dr. Spargent, the medical examiner, arrived, and the two professional men consulted gravely.

Dr. Hounder's story was explicit. "There was some one with Mr. Farraday when I arrived," he said. "I waited in the music-room. After a while the caller went out through the front door, but I happened not to see him, so I don't know who he was. I was about to knock at the living-room door when it seemed to me I heard voices inside, so I assumed that there was some one still with the old man. A little later I thought I heard a book drop on the floor. Nothing more.

"After a while I decided the voices had been in my imagination, and I crossed the hall and knocked. There was no reply, but Mr. Farraday was slightly hard of hearing, so this did not surprise me. I opened the door and saw him crumpled down on his desk. I started toward him, and of course saw at once that he was dead. The wound was visible as he lay.

"I summoned the man, and we telephoned. A grim thing, certainly."

Dr. Spargent nodded. They were standing just within the room where Mr. Farraday had been killed, and the medical examiner's eyes were busy. In the hall behind them a patrolman who had come with Dr. Spargent stood impassively, waiting orders. Dr. Spargent paid no heed to him; he said to Dr. Hounder: "There's no reason why you should stay. I may want to talk to you later." He knew the reputation of the eminent practitioner and respected it.

"I'm interested," Dr. Hounder replied. "Interested in what you do. And—I liked the old man."

Dr. Spargent nodded. "First thing is always photographs, with me," he said. "The eye sees even still objects in distortion; but a photograph is reasonably reliable—and permanent." He produced a camera and folding tripod from his bag and busied himself about the room, photographing the scene and body at many angles. Dr. Hounder watched, keeping in the background.

The medical examiner was not talkative, but Dr. Hounder found himself impelled to speech. He kept up a running commentary on the other's movements, a running fire of conjecture as to the murder itself—returned to his subject again and again.

"Who would have wanted to kill the old man, do you suppose?" he would ask; and, when Dr. Spargent made no reply: "He was a lovable old fellow." After an interval: "Whoever it was couldn't have gone out through the hall, or I'd have seen them. Must have come in by the window and gone that way." He crossed to the window to look out, and saw the blue-gray of a postman's uniform passing; saw the postman pause at the box on the corner to collect the mail there, and felt a burst of high relief at that—became more garrulous. The others paid him little attention. Dr. Spargent was busy, making photographs and measurements and notes; the policeman at the door held back an increasing number of people there: servants; a woman grieving aloud; a reporter or two already on the scene. Other policemen appeared, but did not enter the room. A plain-clothes man arrived and stood beside the patrolman, watching Dr. Spargent's actions with respect.

The silence of these others began to disquiet Dr. Hounder; he thought there was suspicion in their bearing. But he lifted his head with confidence that even though they might suspect—ridiculous enough—they could never prove. The pistol was safely gone; he himself had, as it were, an alibi, since he could prove he had not left the house. They could suspect on his part no slightest motive. His confidence returned.

It was at about this time that he first saw the finger-print on the edge of the desk.

Dr. Hounder had always known that criminals were sometimes detected by their finger-prints. Considering this danger in advance, he had weighed means to avoid it. Gloves? Awkward; and in themselves calculated to betray. The simple thing was to avoid leaving any prints. A relatively easy matter. If any were left, it would, after all, be possible to point out that he had been in the room the night before.

Dr. Spargent had asked him idly: "Did you touch the body after you discovered it?"

Dr. Hounder had replied: "No! I only came to the end of the desk. No need of touching it."

Dr. Spargent wished to make a photograph of the desk from the door and asked him to step back out of range of the camera. Dr. Hounder leaned against the book-shelves. The desk was between him and the light, and he saw, on its edge, the print of a finger-tip. Even on the red mahogany this print seemed to him glowing and red. He remembered his own fingers had been red when he finished handling the letter. His thoughts suddenly leaped into gear, began to race. The pistol had been lying there on the table; the handkerchief beside it. When he picked up the handkerchief to wipe his hands, one finger must have touched the polished surface. He had left his mark there. In blood! Fit to hang him!

In the silence the shutter of the camera clicked, and Dr. Hounder started at the sound. "Nervous, I guess," he said apologetically. His thoughts were racing. What to do? What to do? His whole body cried aloud the impulse to rush forward and with one sweep of his hand obliterate that damning mark, but caution held him back. Folly to betray his apprehensions. They might not remark the print at all; it might be blurred, indecipherable. He stifled panic, held himself in check, fought for a moment's clear and accurate reasoning.

It came to him, his confidence returning with it. Some way there must be. if he could find it. He had a great

contempt for these muddlers here. Dr. Spargent and his inane photographs, grisly relics of the tragedy; the plain-clothes man silent by the doorway; the flat-footed patrolman with his back repelling the crowd outside. They were beaten; he was safe—but for that faint smear of blood upon the desk top.

The print was almost invisible from where he stood; but for a slant of light which made it seem conspicuous, he would never have discovered it. It was at the very edge of the desk, and as he stared at it the thing assumed monstrous proportions, like a scar. A scar upon the wood there! A scar!

He perceived, considering this wood, the fit solution of his problem, and he laughed to himself at the perfect simplicity of it. Dr. Spargent was preparing to set up his camera at the nearer edge of the desk now; he muddled and puttered to and fro. Dr. Hounder lighted another cigaret and puffed the smoke with delight. He watched Dr. Spargent thoughtfully; at length moved forward. "Let me help you? Hold something?" he suggested.

Dr. Spargent handed him a plate holder; muttered thanks. Dr. Hounder took the thing in his left hand. After a moment he sneezed loudly. Casually enough, he took the cigaret from his lips and laid it on the edge of the desk, thus freeing his right hand to reach for a handkerchief.

He had laid the cigaret with some care exactly upon the finger-print. Standing thus directly above the spot, he could not see the print at all; but he had marked its location well, and was sure the cigaret was properly placed. His impulse, even then, was to smudge the thing; but he noticed that the dull eyes of the patrolman were upon him, and feared to arouse suspicion.

Dr. Spargent still puttered. Dr. Hounder stood patiently by, the plate holder in his hand. It was apparent that he had forgotten his cigaret entirely. It burned, a little wisp of smoke twisting upward from its end. By and by it would reach the wood, still burning, and obliterate that

damning mark. Covertly he watched it, measuring its progress. The shutter clicked; another picture done.

Dr. Spargent put up his camera, disjointed the tripod and put it away. He withdrew to the farther end of the room and sat down at a table there, collating his notes and measurements. The plain-clothes man joined him, and Dr. Hounder approached them confidently. The cigaret had almost reached the desk's edge. Three minutes more and its heat would begin to cause the finish of the mahogany to bubble and scorch. Safety three minutes away! "Anything I can do?" he asked. "I ought to move along."

Dr. Spargent said courteously: "You might tell Riley here what you told me. How you found the body there."

Dr. Hounder repeated his story with just enough variation to lend an air of truth to it. The plain-clothes man listened with downcast eyes, asking a question or two. Dr. Hounder was laughing to himself. A ridiculous thing, this; setting such men to catch clever criminals. So easily befooled! He talked mechanically on. Across the room a little thread of smoke lifted upward from the cigaret. While he talked to Riley, the plain-clothes man, he watched this smoke with secure and dreamy satisfaction. So soon as the cigaret should have burned but a little farther, he would be safe, all his tracks covered, nothing more to fear. He turned his back on the thing at last with fine indifference, gave his attention more fully to Riley's slow questions.

While they still talked together, while Dr. Spargent scratched at his notes, the policeman in the doorway left his post there; he crossed to the desk beside the dead body and looked down at the smoldering cigaret. Then he picked it up, gingerly, between finger and thumb and studied the surface of the table where it had lain. Dr. Hounder, his back turned, did not observe him.

When his scrutiny was finished, the policeman walked slowly across the room, still pinching the butt of the cigaret in his great hand, and touched Dr. Hounder on the elbow. The eminent practitioner turned.

"Here's your cigaret," said the patrolman. "It would have burned the table in a minute."

Dr. Hounder received this communication with a quite uncontrollable quiver of disappointment, which merged into alarm. He stared at the patrolman, whose eyes were blank and dull. In their very blankness the physician read a deadly menace.

Dr. Spargent had opened one of the French windows, to admit a little of the balmy morning air. Dr. Hounder could see his car, out by the gate. Not so far away.

"I looked at the table close," said the patrolman. "You didn't burn it any."

Dr. Hounder, at these simple words, gave way to panic utter and irrevocable; he struck past the dull patrolman toward that open window.

But of course these men were trained to action; they had him, quick as a terrior has its rat. There was something curiously ratlike in his abject and sudden squealings. . . .

"I was watching him," the patrolman explained slowly when Dr. Spargent questioned him. "The rest was guessing."

"A mighty good guess, O'Hearn," the medical examiner applauded.

"Not all guessing," O'Hearn confessed. "There was once I saw he was worried; and him staring at the table. Then he put the cigaret about where he'd been looking—and he didn't look to me like a man that would be careless of nice furniture. And when I picked up the butt and saw it was right on top of that finger-print, I was pretty sure what he'd meant to do."

"But it wasn't his finger-print. The maid left it when she oiled the desk this morning."

O'Hearn nodded. "That's so," he assented. "But the doc didn't know that. You heard what he said. He thought he'd made it—in blood."

"I was surprised, at that, to see the way he talked when we nailed him," Riley suggested.

"The clever ones always do the most talking in the end," replied O'Hearn.

# J. D. BERESFORD

## THE ARTIFICIAL MOLE

We had been discussing the X—— murder in which Hatton had been personally engaged, and I had just repeated the trite remark that the criminal always made some fatal oversight that led to his arrest.

"Not always," Hatton said, and reminded me of the famous series of murders in the late 'eighties attributed to "Jack the Ripper," who, so far as we knew, escaped scot free.

"But in those cases there was no motive in the ordinary sense," I protested. "I'll grant you that it is possible, even easy, to commit a motiveless murder and get away unsuspected."

"Well then," Hatton said, "what about . . ." and he recalled three or four well-known crimes committed in the past ten years for which no criminal has ever been brought to justice.

"Yes. One forgets those cases," I admitted.

"Also," Hatton said, "there are murders now and again which don't get reported at any length in the newspapers and that the general public know next to nothing about." He paused and smiled reminiscently.

"You're thinking of one case in particular?" I ventured.

"I am," he agreed and his smile gave place to a sigh before he continued. "You might write a novel about it. Good stuff for a novel it would be, because there was some mighty interesting psychology in it. Morbid psychology, perhaps; but based on a fundamental weakness in feminine human nature. Though that was only the beginning of it all. The weakness, the blindness you might say, only

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brought about the conditions in which the crime was possible. I've got my old notes here, and if you'll give me a couple of minutes to look them up, I'll tell you about it. I've got all the detail as clearly in my mind as ever it was, but I couldn't be quite sure of the dates without reference; and it was a case in which dates were important.

"It happened in the Spring of 1910," he began when he had rapidly run through his notes. "I was living with my mother in South London at that time, and the interested parties were known to me slightly; which was how I came to be implicated in the first instance. Two half-sisters they were, living together in furnished apartments. They had had different fathers and so different surnames. The elder one, Miss Hannah Grey, was a woman of 35 or so; a tall gaunt woman with a rough voice, and a remarkable identity mark in the shape of a big mole with a tuft of hair on it; as big as a sixpence it was, low down on her left cheek near the angle of the jaw. A terribly pious woman she was by all accounts, and a perfect dragon in looking after her little half-sister; a pretty, timid girl of twenty, who regarded Hannah as a mother, her own mother having died when she was a few months old.

"Well, it was this younger sister, Miss Rose Moore as she was then, who came to see me one Friday evening, the 8th of April to be exact, to ask my advice. "You're a detective, aren't you, Mr. Hatton?" she began and when I had told her that I *was* connected with the C.I.D., she asked me if I could advise her unofficially. I said I could so long as she did not ask me to conceal any crime, and then she came out with her story.

"According to her, Miss Hannah Grey had disappeared. She had gone down to Westbourne, on the previous 12th of March on the plea of ill-health, a colourable excuse as she had certainly been in a very nervous state before she went; hysterical now and again; and more than once her sister had heard her praying aloud in her own room in the small hours of the morning. She had gone very

suddenly at the end, too, and had left no address but Poste Restante, Westbourne.

"Miss Moore was naturally rather anxious about her, but her uneasiness had been considerably lessened by the letters she had received. She had had four in all, none of them dated except by the day of the week, and none of them giving any address. In the first, received on the 15th of March, the Tuesday after Miss Grey went away, she had made the excuse that the boarding-house she was in didn't suit her and that she might be leaving any day. In the other letters she made no further reference to where she was staying, and gave hardly any account of her doings. They were, in fact, peculiarly empty, uninteresting letters, apparently hurriedly written, but with no suggestion in them of unhappiness or distress of any kind. She said that her health had greatly improved and so far as one could judge she appeared to be, for her, unusually cheerful.

"But after the last letter dated 'Sunday' and received ten days before, on the 29th of March, Miss Grey had ceased to write. Miss Moore on her side had written several times since then to Westbourne, begging for news but had had no reply. My first enquiry was as to whether Miss Grey had any tendencies to depression of mind, such as might have tempted her to suicide; but her sister shook her head at that. "Have you any theory, yourself?" I asked, but she said she had not; and though I fancied that she had something in reserve, I did not press her just then; but turned my attention to the envelopes of Miss Grey's letters.

"Three of them were straightforward, and useless, enough; having the postmark, Westbourne, and the date, reasonably clear; but the postmark of the last letter was almost undecipherable. I could make out what looked like a UR near the end of the word and what might have been part of an E three or four letters earlier which seemed to suggest that it, also, came from the same town; but a comparison with the other postmarks showed at once that the last one had been made with a different

stamp, while the spacing of the letters implied, I thought, a shorter name. After that a closer examination under a magnifying glass gave me an F in place of an E for what was probably the first letter; and the possibility that the only other decipherable letters might be OR; an inference that was practically confirmed when I found that there was a little station called Fulford on the branch line that joins up Westbourne with St. Edmund's.

"Miss Moore had never heard of Fulford, and was quite sure that her sister had not mentioned such a place at any time before going away; but the obvious line to take was first to make a call at the Westbourne General Post-Office to see if Miss Moore's recent letters had been called for and then to make an enquiry or two at Fulford, evidently nothing more than a village in which a stranger such as Miss Grey would certainly be noticed. In fact, to cut short this part of the story, I promised Miss Moore to go down to Westbourne the next afternoon, a Saturday, and see if I could find out anything for her, unofficially.

"My own idea at that time, was that Hannah Grey had committed suicide; despite her sister's disbelief in that theory. I was nearly twenty years younger then, and a trifle too cocksure in my judgments of men and women; apt to divide them all up into types and docket them without too close an examination. I had not had a great deal of experience, you see, and what I had had was almost entirely confined to the ordinary criminal class.

"And my first call at the Westbourne Post-Office gave me no reason to alter my mind. Miss Moore's letters had been called for until Saturday, the 26th of March. The post-office clerk remembered Miss Grey as soon as I described the mole on her cheek, and was able, as it happened, to fix the date on which he had last seen her; that date being the day before she had written the last letter to her sister. The later letters from Miss Moore, five in all, had never been called for.

"Well, the way I worked it out in the little branch line train going to Fulford was that Hannah Grey had been suffering from some kind of delusion, but had been sane

enough to wish to spare her beloved half-sister the pain of knowing that she proposed to commit suicide; and had carefully laid her plans accordingly. Perhaps I was not so far out in the matter of the delusion, but as I was soon to learn, it had been of a very different kind.

"Fulford is just a small village of 500 or so inhabitants, a mile from the station and half a mile from the sea. A bleak, desolate place, set down in the marshes. A perfect beast of a little place, I thought it that afternoon, for there was a bitter East wind blowing; and not so much as a hedge anywhere to shelter you. I've called it a station, by the way; but it was only a 'halt' in those days, just one platform and a shed—it was a single line—and the guard of the train took and distributed the tickets.

"Nevertheless, Fulford, from my point of view, had certain advantages to recommend it, the chief of them being that there was but one centre of information in the village, a general shop that was even more promiscuous than the average shop of that kind, since it was Post-Office, grocers, haberdashers, stationers, bakers and everything else you can think of all in one. And the woman and her husband who kept it with the help of their son Joe, a boy of fifteen who went the rounds in a cart, were reasonably intelligent people and fairly sharp observers, though like most of the witnesses I've come across in that walk of life they chiefly noticed the things that were of little use to me in my work.

"However, they knew quite a lot about the lady I was looking for. She had drawn attention to herself from the start by coming down there at all at that time of year. But she had not stayed in the village. Some enterprising town-planner of that period had had the idea of making his fortune by building half-a-dozen small houses close down to the sea; 'Bungalow Town' he had christened it; and my friends at the shop—Robinson their name was—were his house-agents.

"Nothing in that so far, perhaps, and all helping to bear out my theory, but I got the surprise of my life wher I learnt at the very beginning of my conversation that she

had come down there and had lived in one of those houses by the sea with a man. I could hardly believe it when they first told me. I had seen Hannah Grey two or three times, and knew her reputation for pious respectability; and if I had been asked who was the least likely woman I had ever known to set off on a prank of that kind, her name would have been the first to occur to me. I knew she had a bit of money of her own; and I guessed right away what the man's game had been. What beat me was how he could ever have persuaded her to go away with him. She was not a fool by any means.

"But that piece of information put another face on the business altogether; and I dropped the casual enquiry line I had begun with, showed the Robinsons my badge and gave them to understand that I wanted their evidence officially. They pulled themselves together pretty quickly when they found out I came from Scotland Yard, but I remember that their first reaction to that was to tell me that Mr. and Mrs. Gunn, as they called themselves, had paid all their bills before they went away. From first to last, the Robinsons hadn't, I believe, any suspicion that it might be anything worse than a charge of some form of swindling that I had against this so-called Mr. Henry Gunn.

"Now I'll boil down the story I got bit by bit from the Robinsons, just to give you the real essentials; and I may tell you that it was not quite the kind of story I was anticipating.

"The first part fitted well enough, however. Mr. Henry Gunn had evidently been cautious from the start. He had come down at the end of February and taken the house 'Belleview,'—that was how they had spelt it!—after a few very casual enquiries. Only one thing he had insisted upon: was there central heating from a separate furnace, because he suffered greatly from the cold? And, as it happened, that one house 'Belleview' had what he wanted; being the first that was built, and designed, it seemed, to be lived in all the year round.

"After that, Mr. Gunn was very easily satisfied; did not

want to see how the place was furnished; but took it at once without even inspecting it, paid the rent in advance until the end of March and said that he would write to tell them what day and at what time to expect him and Mrs. Gunn, and to give them all the necessary orders with reference to provisions, particularly coke for the furnace. The Robinsons were not the least suspicious of him. They were only too glad to get a good customer at that time of year. In appearance Mrs. Robinson told me, he was a man of about middle height, with a heavy black moustache, and a white skin. She thought he was probably consumptive. But she, herself, saw him only that once; and the boy, Joe, who was my principal witness, did not seem to have taken much notice of him. All he could do was to confirm his mother's description.

"So far, it all looked plain sailing with a nasty, unsavoury crime at the end of the course; but I was to be very considerably puzzled by what came after. The Gunns arrived at Fulford in the afternoon of the 12th of March, the day Hannah Grey had left London. They had a wagonette to meet them, had ordered everything in advance by letter, and drove straight to 'Belleview.' For a fortnight, they behaved as one might expect any middle-aged couple to behave in the circumstances except that Mr. Gunn never went out except to take a walk on the lonely beach. Mrs. Gunn, however, sometimes came up to the village and on three or four occasions went into Westbourne by train. They had all their provisions from the Robinsons' shop, and the boy Joe called every morning except Sunday for orders.

"Then on the 28th of March—we could fix the date without difficulty—Mr. Gunn was, according to his wife's statement—taken ill with influenza. Nothing serious, Mrs. Gunn told Joe—they never had or even asked for a doctor—but he would have to keep his bed for a few days. Now that date, you notice, was the day after that on which Hannah had written her last letter to her half-sister; and although Mr. Gunn's illness explained well enough why Hannah had not called at the Westbourne post-office there

seemed no particular reason why she should not have written. Also, Joe said that he thought Mrs. Gunn was rather 'queer' after her husband fell ill. Sometimes she called her orders from the bedroom window, sometimes pinned a piece of paper on the door. And all that time, Joe never once set foot in the house. Either he left the milk, bread and groceries in the yard, or Mrs. Gunn took them from him on the threshold of the back door.

"That puzzled me a little, but there was some still more bewildering information to come, for it seemed that Mrs. Gunn had left the place only the day before the 8th of April, going by the evening train to Westbourne, while Mr. Gunn had followed her that very morning, but had gone to town, if he had been going to town, the other way by St. Edmund's. Naturally the Robinsons had been a trifle surprised that Mrs. Gunn should go away leaving her husband all alone in the house after he had but just recovered from an attack of influenza; but she had seen no one but Joe who drove her to the station, had not been communicative and as she had no luggage, it had been presumed that she would be returning the next day.

"Mr. Gunn's departure that morning had been rather more noticeable. He had been, the Robinsons inferred, not only in a very poor state of health but, also, considerably agitated. He had been fully dressed with his overcoat and hat on when Joe had called at the house with the milk and bread at eight o'clock, had spoken to him from the bedroom window, and both then and later when he drove to the station at eleven o'clock, had worn a heavy woollen muffler which he kept over his mouth. I cross-examined the boy, Joe, fairly strictly about these facts, all of them so very fresh in his memory, but I got nothing more of any value, and if the details were a trifle suspicious in some ways, they were all perfectly consistent with what had gone before; the one surprising thing being that Mrs. Gunn should have gone off alone. 'We reckoned they must have had a quarrel of some kind,' Mrs. Robinson said and I was inclined to agree with her.

"Well, I got the keys of the house from the Robinsons and went down alone to have a look at it. I did not expect to find anything that would help me and I didn't till just as I was leaving. The house was in two storeys—all the other houses, none of them occupied at the time, were bungalows—and somewhat lightly furnished in the style of a place meant to be let for the summer season. The furnace was in the coal cellar leading out of the kitchen, but I didn't examine anything very closely. There seemed to be no reason why I should; the place was all very clean and tidy as if before she had gone away Hannah had put everything straight for the next tenant, the one exception being the bedroom in which Mr. Gunn had presumably slept the night before. Even that was reasonably neat and I noticed that the wash-basin had not been used. Either he must have washed under the tap in the scullery downstairs or not at all.

"I was just leaving the bedroom when it came into my mind to test the radiator. The house seemed warm in comparison with the cold outer air and I guessed that the furnace had not gone out very long before. And by one of those extraordinary chances that do happen sometimes in real life, I ran my fingers along the top pipe of the radiator—it was an old-fashioned tubular affair—in just such a way as to feel something between the radiator and the wall. It tickled my fingers, and I thought it was a spider; and as I have a peculiar objection to spiders, I got hold of it and hawked it out. But it was not a spider, although at first sight it looked just like one, but a very peculiar object that you will find to-day in the Criminal Museum at Scotland Yard, if you should have the curiosity to go and look for it—a round piece of black rubber about the size of a sixpence, with a tuft of hairs neatly threaded through it and fastened with spirit gum.

"Naturally, I kept that, but it wasn't until I was in the train going back to town that the explanation of the whole affair came to me. I saw it all then in a flash. Mr. Gunn had been doubling the parts of himself and Hannah for nearly a fortnight, and the first and most important

item of his disguise had been an artificial mole. The more I thought over it, the more convincingly did that theory seem to fit the facts. Going back over the Robinsons' evidence, it all came to me as clear as a pikestaff. His own temporary disappearance had been fully accounted for by his illness, which, also, gave a reason for his not having to appear disguised as Hannah except to the boy Joe; and then, except on the evening he left—when it was getting dark—only for very brief interviews. Then again he had had to keep his muffler up to his face that morning in order to conceal the fact that he had shaved off his moustache. Oh! yes everything fitted in like the pieces of a puzzle. After that, nearly all that I had to do was to discover if it had been possible for him to have left Fulford at 6.30 on the previous evening and be back there in time to get away again, as himself, by the next morning? And it was. The time-table showed me that he could have left Westbourne by the 7.10 for London; have got out at 7.50 at the first stop, Catbridge Junction, and have taken the 8.5 from there to St. Edmund's in time to catch the 9.15 on the branch line back to Fulford. Probably, I decided, he had got out at Northbeach, a station earlier and walked from there in the dark along the sands to Belleview. That itinerary presented no difficulties.

"Finally to clinch the theory, I saw only too clearly, the reason for his manœuvres. He had probably murdered the unfortunate Hannah somewhere about the 28th of March; and had spent the ensuing ten days in getting rid of the body. He had the furnace he had been so insistent upon, for the best part of the work and the calcined bones had probably either been crushed and powdered or destroyed by acid. Oh! yes! It is not so difficult to get rid of all traces of a body if you have time enough; and that was the factor Mr. Henry Gunn had planned to make sure of.

"Well, I had never a doubt that I was right, nor had my chief to whom I told the whole story, as soon as I got back to town. Indeed, he congratulated me very warmly on what I had done; and I went home as proud as a peacock. I did not see Miss Moore that night, by the

way. For one thing, I wanted to have my case complete first; and for another I did not at all relish having to break the news to her.

"So far so good, eh? And when I went down on a still warm scent in a car the next day—a Sunday, you remember, and I should never have been able to get through, if I had had to rely on the train service—I felt pretty hopeful of having Mr. Henry Gunn under observation in the course of twenty-four hours or so; though as my chief had pointed out, we might have a hard job to bring the crime home if the body had been absolutely destroyed.

"But that was where things began to go wrong. I could trace Mr. Gunn dressed as Miss Hannah Grey into the 7.10 train for town from Westbourne on Friday evening; and I got news of him in his own clothes leaving for the same destination from St. Edmund's on Saturday morning. But in both cases after he had once got into the train he seemed to have completely disappeared. Not a trace of him at Catbridge Junction or anywhere else along the line on Friday evening; nor, again, on Saturday morning. And yet he must have been a noticeable figure on both occasions.

"Well, of course, we went through 'Belleview' pretty throughly, dug up the garden, took up the floors, sifted the ashes of the furnace. But we didn't find a scrap of evidence. The job had been too thoroughly and carefully done. In fact, the only other piece of corroborative evidence we picked up, was when we went into Miss Hannah Grey's business affairs and found out that in the course of February, she had sold all her securities, drawn her money from the Bank and changed most of it into French notes at the Credit Lyonnais—notes of a hundred francs each that had not been in sequence and no record had been kept of the numbers. Must have been a nice haul for Mr. Gunn: over £5,000 in all, I calculated.

"Well, there you are, eh?" Hatton said watching me with a grim smile. "There's a case for you in which the criminal made no mistake unless you count the fact that he mislaid that artificial mole as one? Lord! how I used

to go over that affair in my mind afterwards, trying to work out how he had been too clever for us."

"And you never caught Mr. Henry Gunn?" I asked.

"Never," Hatton said. But I knew by his smile that his story was not quite finished.

"Nor heard of him?" I enquired.

"Ah! I didn't say that," he replied. "As a matter of fact, we heard all about him—ten years later. And from whom do you think?"

I shook my head. I have no gift for the drawing of inferences of this kind.

"From Miss Hannah Grey!" Hatton said.

I stared at him in complete bewilderment. "Do you mean to say . . ." I began.

"That she'd never been murdered?" he supplied. "I do mean just that, and the case has been a warning to me not to let myself be led away by fixing my mind on a theory while I'm investigating the facts. If I'd not been so sure of what had happened, I might . . . However, I'm not sorry in some ways that I made a mistake; especially as I married Miss Grey's half-sister, Miss Rose Moore. We've been married getting on for twenty years now."

"Well, aren't you going to tell me about it?" I prompted him as he paused thoughtfully on his last statement.

"Yes; I'll tell you," Hatton said, "though this part of the story isn't in my line. You see, this is where the psychology I spoke of comes in; and I'm not sure if I can make you understand it. To begin with you must know that Miss Grey had a French grandmother, her father's mother; and spent a good part of her time until she was nearly twenty, in France. And what one would never have suspected her of, in middle-age, was what you might call the undeveloped passion in her blood. Rose had guessed it. She was not surprised when I told her that her sister had gone off with Mr. Gunn. 'Oh! I was so afraid of that,' she said, and when I asked her why, she told me that it was because Hannah 'had always been so dreadfully down on that sort of thing.' Queer reason, eh? But I fancy I can understand it. What people talk of now-

adays as suppressions, Freud and that stuff. And in her case, it was all mixed up with religion which seems to have made it worse. Anyway when she did give in, she went the whole way, and then became extra pious afterwards to make up for it; turned Roman Catholic and went into a convent in Belgium. It was from there Rose heard from her. She thought she was dying when she wrote, the letter was forwarded from Rose's old address; but she lived for another twelve months after that; and Rose saw her on three occasions in all; and had the whole story at one time or another.

"Well, I can give you my side of it, but what beats me is to get the atmosphere—to describe all the agonies that unfortunate woman went through. You could make a novel out of that, but it wouldn't be very cheerful reading. You see, in the first place, she always had her suspicions of Mr. Gunn, but he charmed her somehow; he seems to have had a gift with women; and in some ways she was as weak with him as a girl of eighteen. He was the only man who ever made love to her, and I suppose there was something in her French blood that couldn't resist him.

"But to get back to the crime, it seems that I must have been right about Gunn up to a point. He must have been pretty much the kind of scoundrel I had inferred and laid the kind of plans I had attributed to him up to the point of murdering Hannah, destroying the body in the furnace, and laying a false scent by getting away in her clothes. It would not have been too difficult. They were about the same height, her voice was easy to imitate and with that identity mark of hers which always caught the attention, he might quite easily have brought it off. Only one thing, probably, prevented him. Hannah Grey got in first.

"It seems that in the course of that first fortnight at Fulford, her suspicion of him had been steadily growing, but what finally set her off was precisely the same queer piece of evidence that put me on the track—the artificial mole! She came into the room quietly one day, and caught

him sitting at the dressing-table trying the effect of it on his own cheek. And that, apart from her suspicion of him and her instant intuition of what his game was,—she was no fool—seems to have got her on the raw. A kind of vanity, perhaps? She was mad to think that he should imitate her deformity. And Gunn obviously saw that the game was up and went for her out of hand. They struggled; and she was stronger than he was, she pushed him violently back against the wall, he struck the back of his head, and was either stunned or fainted—his heart, apparently, was none too strong. And if she had tied him up and left him there to recover, she might have got away with no sin on her conscience other than that she believed herself to have already committed. But as she told Rose, 'something stronger than she was took hold of her'; a tremendous reaction against him and herself and the whole affair, I suppose. Anyway, explain it how you like, she strangled him while he was still unconscious.

"After that, came the price she had to pay for all that she had done; and a pretty severe price it must have been. You see, she was no shrewd, experienced criminal. She had no plans, and what with spending most of her time on her knees praying for forgiveness, she was in no state of mind to make any. For ten days, she lived in that house with the body of Mr. Gunn; but in between her bouts of penance, she had just sense enough to keep up appearances; give her orders to Joe every morning and destroy the food he left for them. She says that she herself ate nothing all that time. It may be true. I'm told that a wonderful clearness of mind comes to people sometimes when they are starving; and that clearness presently came to her. *She* said, of course, that spirits guided her. I would not deny that, either.

"But her inspiration was mighty near coming too late. She had started to run away on that Friday—the evening before I went down to Fulford the first time,—and it wasn't until she was sitting in the train in Westbourne station, that—what shall I say?—the impulse came to her.

Hannah, you understand, made out that it was a kind of miracle, the first step of her conversion to the Roman Catholic faith. She talked of voices, in the Joan of Arc style, of being wonderfully guided and told what she must do. Your psychologist would say, I don't doubt, that all those notions were illusions consequent upon ten days' starvation and excitement; but, to me, that only begs the question.

"However, what is certain is that she was somehow strung up to a very remarkable feat of strength and endurance. She got out of the train on the side away from the platform,—she was alone in the compartment,—made her way across the metals without being seen in the dusk, and walked back to 'Belleview' along the beach. It was two days after the new moon, there was an unusually low tide that night, and when she got back to the house, she stripped Gunn's body and somehow managed to drag it down to the sea, weight it with a couple of big stones and drown it soon after midnight, at the bottom of the ebb.

"All that time she was in a hysterical ecstasy, you understand, which seems to have upheld her for two or three days. The notions of tidying up the house, packing her luggage and Gunn's and finally escaping in his clothes, were all, according to her, instructions given her by the 'voices.' And whatever way you look at it, the luck was all running her way about that time. She had a compartment to herself on the train from St. Edmund's, and changed back into her own clothes, which was why I got no news of Gunn on that line, for I was so obsessed with the idea of looking for him that I never made a single enquiry for her.

"Well, after that the rest was easy. No passports were necessary for France or Belgium in those pre-war days; she spoke French and had plenty of French money with her. Even if I'd been looking for her instead of Gunn, I might have missed her. And she crossed by night, and managed to drop Gunn's luggage overboard in mid-channel without being seen. When she arrived in Belgium, she went straight to Louvain, because she had stayed there once in

her youth and knew of a convent in the place. She had no difficulty in being accepted into the Roman Catholic Church, made her confession, of course, presented her 200,000 francs to the convent and became the most pious nun in the place. They would have made her Sister Superior after the German occupation, but she was too humble to accept such a position. She lived for eleven years after she went to Louvain, and I fancy she was reasonably happy, though all her life was one long penance —a part of which by the way was to hold no communication with anyone in England until she believed that she was dying; not that she was greatly tempted, I expect, except in the case of Rose.

"Well, there you are, sir; that's the story of the queerest case I ever had anything to do with; a mixture of psychology, what you may call the ordinary criminal cunning and, the most unusual factor, mysticism. Personally, I don't blame myself for having been deceived. There were incidents in which it really seemed as if you could read the hand of fate. That matter of the high tide, for example, which completely wiped out all traces of the dragging of Gunn's body down the beach. To say nothing of the East wind I referred to, earlier, to do the same work with the loose sand above high-water mark. You may call it Fate, Luck, Coincidence, anything you like, but I sometimes wonder if they are not just different names for the same thing."

# CAROLYN WELLS

## CHRISTABEL'S CRYSTAL

Of all the unexpected pleasures that have come into my life, I think perhaps the greatest was when Christabel Farland asked me to be bridesmaid at her wedding.

I always had liked Christabel at college, and though we hadn't seen much of each other since we were graduated, I still had a strong feeling of friendship for her, and besides that I was glad to be one of the merry house party gathered at Farland Hall for the wedding festivities.

I arrived the afternoon before the wedding-day, and found the family and guests drinking tea in the library. Two other bridesmaids were there, Alice Fordham and Janet White, with both of whom I was slightly acquainted. The men, however, except Christabel's brother Fred, were strangers to me, and were introduced as Mr. Richmond, who was to be an usher; Herbert Gay, a neighbor, who chanced to be calling; and Mr. Wayne, the tutor of Christabel's younger brother Harold. Mrs. Farland was there too, and her welcoming words to me were as sweet and cordial as Christabel's.

The party was in frivolous mood, and as the jests and laughter grew more hilarious, Mrs. Farland declared that she would take the bride-elect away to her room for a quiet rest, lest she should not appear at her best the next day.

"Come with me, Elinor," said Christabel to me, "and I will show you my wedding-gifts."

Together we went to the room set apart for the purpose, and on many white-draped tables I saw displayed the gorgeous profusion of silver, glass and bric-à-brac that are one of the chief component parts of a wedding of to-day.

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I had gone entirely through my vocabulary of ecstatic adjectives and was beginning over again, when we came to a small table which held only one wedding-gift.

"That is the gem of the whole collection," said Christabel, with a happy smile, "not only because Laurence gave it to me, but because of its intrinsic perfection and rarity."

I looked at the bridegroom's gift in some surprise. Instead of the conventional diamond sunburst or heart-shaped brooch, I saw a crystal ball as large as a fair-sized orange.

I knew of Christabel's fondness for Japanese crystals and that she had a number of small ones of varying qualities; but this magnificent specimen fairly took my breath away. It was poised on the top of one of those wave-crests, which the artisans seem to think appropriately interpreted in wrought-iron. Now, I haven't the same subtle sympathy with crystals that Christabel always has had; but still this great, perfect, limpid sphere affected me strangely. I glanced at it at first with a calm interest; but as I continued to look I became fascinated, and soon found myself obliged (if I may use the expression) to tear my eyes away.

Christabel watched me curiously. "Do you love it too?" she said, and then she turned her eyes to the crystal with a rapt and rapturous gaze that made her appear lovelier than ever. "Wasn't it dear of Laurence?" she said. "He wanted to give me jewels of course; but I told him that I would rather have this big crystal than the Koh-i-nur. I have six others, you know; but the largest of them hasn't one-third the diameter of this."

"It is wonderful," I said, "and I am glad you have it. I must own it frightens me a little."

"That is because of its perfection," said Christabel simply. "Absolute flawless perfection always is awesome. And when it is combined with perfect, faultless beauty, it is the ultimate perfection of a material thing."

"But I thought you liked crystals because of their weird supernatural influence over you," I said.

"That is an effect, not a cause," Christabel replied.

"Ultimate perfection is so rare in our experiences that its existence perforce produces consequences so rare as to be dubbed weird and supernatural. But I must not gaze at my crystal longer now, or I shall forget that it is my wedding-day. I'm not going to look at it again until after I return from my wedding-trip; and then, as I tell Laurence, he will have to share my affection with his wedding-gift to me."

Christabel gave the crystal a long parting look, and then ran away to don her wedding-gown. "Elinor," she called over her shoulder, as she neared her own door, "I'll leave my crystal in your special care. See that nothing happens to it while I'm away."

"Trust me!" I called back gaily, and then went in search of my sister bridesmaids.

The morning after the wedding began rather later than most mornings. But at last we all were seated at the breakfast-table and enthusiastically discussing the events of the night before. It seemed strange to be there without Christabel, and Mrs. Farland said that I must stay until the bridal pair returned, for she couldn't get along without a daughter of some sort.

This remark made me look anywhere rather than at Fred Farland, and so I chanced to catch Harold's eye. But the boy gave me such an intelligent, mischievous smile that I actually blushed and was covered with confusion.

Just at that moment Katy the parlor-maid came into the dining-room, and with an anxious expression on her face said: "Mrs. Farland, do you know anything about Miss Christabel's glass ball? It isn't in the present-room."

"No," said Mrs. Farland; "but I suppose Mr. Haley put it in the safe with the silver and jewelry."

"I don't think so, ma'am; for he asked me was he to take any of the cut glass, and I told him you had said only the silver and gold, ma'am."

"But that crystal isn't cut glass, Katy; and it's more valuable than all Miss Christabel's silver gifts put together."

"Oh, my! is it, ma'am? Well, then, won't you please see if it's all right, for I'm worried about it."

I wish I could describe my feelings at this moment. Have you ever been in imminent danger of a fearful catastrophe of any kind, and while with all your heart and soul you hoped it might be averted, yet there was one little, tiny, hidden impulse of your mind that craved the excitement of the disaster? Perhaps it is only an ignoble nature that can have this experience, or there may be a partial excuse for me in the fact that I am afflicted with what sometimes is called the "detective instinct." I say afflicted, for I well know that anyone else who has this particular mental bias will agree with me that it causes far more annoyance than satisfaction.

Why, one morning when I met Mrs. Van Allen in the market, I said: "It's too bad your waitress had to go out of town to attend the funeral of a near relative, when you were expecting company to luncheon." And she was as angry as could be, and called me an impertinent busybody.

But I just had deduced it all from her glove. You see, she had on one brand-new black-kid glove, and the other, though crumpled up in her hand, I could see never had been on at all. So I knew that she wouldn't start to market early in the morning with such gloves if she had any sort of half-worn black ones at all.

And I knew that she had given away her next-best pair recently—it must have been the night before, or she would have tried them on sooner; and as her cook is an enormous woman, I was sure that she had given them to her waitress. And why would she, unless the maid was going away in great haste? And what would require such a condition of things except a sudden call to a funeral? And it must have been out of town, or she would have waited until morning, and then she could have bought black gloves for herself. And it must have been a near relative, to make the case so urgent. And I knew that Mrs. Van Allen expected luncheon guests, because her fingers were stained from paring apples; and why would

she pare her own apples so early in the morning except to assist the cook in some hurried preparations? Why, it was all as plain as could be, and every bit true; but Mrs. Van Allen wouldn't believe my explanation, and to this day she thinks I made my discoveries by gossiping with her servants.

Perhaps all this will help you to understand why I felt a sort of nervous exhilaration that had in it an element of secret pleasure, when we learned that Christabel's crystal really was missing.

Mr. Haley, who was a policeman, had remained in the present-room during all of the hours devoted to the wedding celebration, and after the guests had gone he had packed up the silver, gold and jewels and put them away in the family safe, which stood in a small dressing-room between Mrs. Farland's bedroom and Fred's. He had worn civilian's dress during the evening, and few if any of the guests knew that he was guarding the valuable gifts. The mistake had been in not telling him explicitly to care for the crystal as the most valuable gem of all; but this point had been overlooked, and the ignorant officer had assumed that it was merely a piece of cut glass, of no more value than any of the carafes or decanters. When told that the ball's intrinsic value was many thousands of dollars, and that it would be next to impossible to duplicate it at any price, his amazement was unbounded, and he appeared extremely grave.

"You ought to have told me," he said. "Sure, it's a case for the chief now!" Haley had been hastily telephoned for to come to Farland Hall and tell his story, and now he telephoned for the chief of police and a detective.

I felt a thrill of delight at this, for I always had longed to see a real detective in the act of detecting.

Of course everybody was greatly excited, and I just gave myself up to the enjoyment of the situation, when suddenly I remembered that Christabel had said that she would leave her crystal in my charge, and that in a way I was responsible for its safety. This changed my whole attitude, and I realized that, instead of being an idly curi-

ous observer, I must put all my detective instinct to work immediately and use every endeavor to recover the lost crystal.

First, I flew to my own room and sat down for a few moments to collect my thoughts and lay my plans. Of course, as the windows of the present-room were found in the morning fastened as they were left the night before, the theft must have been committed by some one in the house. Naturally it was not one of the family or the guests of the house. As to the servants, they all were honest and trustworthy—I had Mrs. Farland's word for that. There was no reason to suspect the policeman, and thus my process of elimination brought me to Mr. Wayne, Harold's tutor.

Of course it must have been the tutor. In nine-tenths of all the detective stories I ever have read the criminal proved to be a tutor or secretary or some sort of gentlemanly dependent of the family; and now I had come upon a detective story in real life, and here was the regulation criminal ready to fit right into it. It was the tutor of course; but I should be discreet and not name him until I had collected some undeniable evidence.

Next, I went down to the present-room to search for clues. The detective had not arrived yet, and I was glad to be first on the ground, for I remembered how much importance Sherlock Holmes always attached to the first search. I didn't really expect that the tutor had left shreds of his clothing clinging to the table-legs, or anything absurd like that; but I fully expected to find a clue of some sort. I hoped that it wouldn't be cigar ashes; for though detectives in fiction always can tell the name and price of a cigar from a bit of ash, yet I'm so ignorant about such things that all ashes are alike to me.

I hunted carefully all over the floor; but I couldn't find a thing that seemed the least bit like a clue, except a faded white carnation. Of course that wasn't an unusual thing to find, the day after a wedding; but it surprised me some, because it was the very flower I had given to Fred Farland the night before. and he had worn it in his button-

hole. I recognized it perfectly, for it was wired, and I had twisted it a certain way when I adjusted it for him.

This didn't seem like strong evidence against the tutor; but it was convincing to me, for if Mr. Wayne was villain enough to steal Christabel's crystal, he was wicked enough to manage to get Fred's boutonnière and leave it in the room, hoping thereby to incriminate Fred. So fearful was I that this trick might make trouble for Fred that I said nothing about the carnation; for I knew that it was in Fred's coat when he said good-night, and then we all went directly to our rooms. When the detective came he examined the room, and I know that he didn't find anything in the way of evidence; but he tried to appear as if he had, and he frowned and jotted down notes in a book after the most approved fashion.

Then he called in everybody who had been in the house over night and questioned each one. I could see at once that his questions to the family and guests were purely perfunctory, and that he too had his suspicions of the tutor.

Finally, it was Mr. Wayne's turn. He always was a nervous little man, and now he seemed terribly flustered. The detective was gentle with him, and in order to set him more at ease began to converse generally on crystals. He asked Mr. Wayne if he had traveled much, if he ever had been to Japan, and if he knew much about the making and polishing of crystal balls.

The tutor fidgeted around a good deal and seemed disinclined to look the detective in the eye; but he replied that he never had been to Japan, and that he never had heard of a Japanese rock crystal until he had seen Miss Farland's wedding-gift; and that even then he had no idea of its great value until since its disappearance he had heard its price named.

This sounded well; but his manner was so embarrassed, and he had such an effect of a guilty man, that I felt sure my intuitions were correct and that he himself was the thief.

The detective seemed to think so too, for he said at last:

"Mr. Wayne, your words seem to indicate your innocence; but your attitudes do not. Unless you can explain why you are so agitated and apparently afraid, I shall be forced to the conclusion that you know more about this than you have admitted."

Then Mr. Wayne said: "Must I tell all I know about it, sir?"

"Certainly," said the detective.

"Then," said Mr. Wayne, "I shall have to state that when I left my room late last night to get a glass of water from the ice-pitcher, which always stands on the hall-table, I saw Mr. Fred Farland just going into the sitting-room, or present-room, as it has been called for the last few days."

There was a dead silence. This, then, was why Mr. Wayne had acted so embarrassed; this was the explanation of my finding the white carnation there; and I think the detective thought that the sudden turn affairs had taken incriminated Fred Farland.

I didn't think so at all. The idea of Fred's stealing his own sister's wedding-gift was too preposterous to be considered for a moment.

"Were you in the room late at night, Mr. Farland?" asked the detective.

"I was," said Fred.

"Why didn't you tell me this before?"

"You didn't ask me, and as I didn't take the crystal I saw no reason for referring to the fact that I was in the room."

"Why did you go there?"

"I went," said Fred coolly, "with the intention of taking the crystal and hiding it, as a practical joke on Christabel."

"Why did you not do so?"

"Because the ball wasn't there. I didn't think then that it had been stolen, but that it had been put away safely with the other valuables. Since this is not so, and the crystal is missing, we all must get to work and find it somehow before my sister returns."

The tutor seemed like a new man after Fred had spoken. His face cleared, and he appeared intelligent, alert and entirely at his ease. "Let me help," he said. "Pray command my services in any way you choose."

But the detective didn't seem so reassured by Fred's statements. Indeed, I believe he really thought that Christabel's brother was guilty of theft.

But I believed implicitly every word Fred had uttered, and begging him to come with me, I led the way again to the sitting-room. Mr. Wayne and Janet White came too, and the four of us scrutinized the floor, walls and furniture of the room over and over again. "There's one thing certain," I said thoughtfully: "The crystal was taken either by some one in the house or some one out of it. We've been confining our suspicions to those inside. Why not a real burglar?"

"But the windows are fastened on the inside," said Janet.

"I know it," I replied. "But if a burglar could slip a catch with a thin-bladed knife—and they often do—then he could slip it back again with the same knife and so divert suspicion."

"Bravo, Miss Frost!" said Mr. Wayne, with an admiring glance at me. "You have the true detective instinct. I'll go outside and see if there are any traces."

A moment later he was on the veranda and excitedly motioning us to raise the window. Fred pushed back the catch and opened the long French window that opened on the front veranda.

"I believe Miss Frost has discovered the mystery," said Mr. Wayne, and he pointed to numerous scratches on the sash-frame. The house had been painted recently, and it was seen easily that the fresh scratches were made by a thin knife-blade pushed between the sashes.

"By Jove!" cried Fred, "that's it, Elinor; and the canny fellow had wit enough to push the catch back in place after he was outside again."

I said nothing, for a moment. My thoughts were adjusting themselves quickly to the new situation from

which I must make my deductions. I realized at once that I must give up my theory of the tutor, of course, and anyway I hadn't had a scrap of evidence against him except his fitness for the position. But, given the surety of burglars from outside, I knew just what to do: look for footprints, to be sure.

I glanced around for the light snow that always falls in detective stories just before the crime is committed, and is testified, usually by the village folk, to have stopped just at the crucial moment. But there wasn't a sign of snow or rain or even dew. The veranda showed no footprints, nor could the smooth lawn or flagged walks be expected to. I leaned against the veranda railing in despair, wondering what Sherlock Holmes would do in a provoking absence of footprints, when I saw in the flower-bed beneath several well-defined marks of a man's shoes.

"There you are, Fred!" I cried, and rushed excitedly down the steps.

They all followed, and, sure enough, in the soft earth of the wide flower-bed that surrounded the veranda were strong, clear prints of large masculine footgear.

"That clears us, girls," cried Janet gleefully, as she measured her daintily shod foot against the depressions.

"Don't touch them!" I cried. "Call Mr. Prout the detective."

Mr. Prout appeared, and politely hiding his chagrin at not having discovered these marks before I did, proceeded to examine them closely.

"You see," he said in a pompous and dictatorial way, "there are four prints pointing toward the house, and four pointing toward the street. Those pointing to the street are superimposed upon those leading to the house, hence we deduce that they were made by a burglar who crossed the flower-bed, climbed the veranda, stepped over the rail and entered at the window. He then returned the same way, leaving these last footprints above the others."

As all this was so palpably evident from the facts of the

case, I was not impressed much by the subtlety of his deductions and asked him what he gathered from the shape of the prints.

He looked at the well-defined prints intently. "They are of a medium size," he announced at last, "and I should say that they were made by a man of average height and weight, who had a normal-sized foot."

Well, if that wasn't disappointing! I thought of course that he would tell the man's occupation and social status, even if he didn't say that he was left-handed or that he stuttered, which is the kind of thing detectives in fiction always discover.

So I lost all interest in that Prout man, and began to do a little deducing on my own account. Although I felt sure, as we all did, that the thief was a burglar from outside, yet I couldn't measure the shoes of an absent and unidentified burglar, and somehow I felt an uncontrollable impulse to measure shoes.

Without consulting anybody, I found a tape-measure and carefully measured the footprints. Then I went through the house and measured all the men's shoes I could find, from the stable-boy's up to Fred's.

It's an astonishing fact, but nearly all of them fitted the measurements of the prints on the flower-bed. Men's feet are so nearly universal in size, or rather their shoes are, and too, what with extension soles and queer-shaped lasts, you can't tell anything about the size or style of a man from his footprints.

So I gave up deducing and went to talk to Fred Farland.

"Fred," I said simply, "did you take Christabel's crystal?"

"No," he answered with equal simplicity, and he looked me in the eyes so squarely and honestly that I knew he spoke the truth.

"Who did?" I next inquired.

"It was a professional burglar," said Fred, "and a mighty cute one; but I'm going to track him and get that crystal back before Christabel comes home."

"Let me help!" I cried eagerly. "I've got the true detective instinct, and I know I can do something."

"You?" said Fred incredulously. "No, you can't help; but I don't mind telling you my plan. You see I expect Lord Hammerton down to make me a visit. He's a jolly young English chap that I chummed with in London. Now, he's a first-rate amateur detective, and though I didn't expect him till next month, he's in New-York, and I've no doubt that he'd be willing to come right off. No one will know he's doing any detecting; and I'll wager he'll lay his hands on that ball in less than a week."

"Lovely!" I exclaimed. "And I'll be here to see him do it!"

"Yes, the mater says you're to stay a fortnight or more; but mind, this is our secret."

"Trust me," I said earnestly; "but let me help if I can, won't you?"

"You'll help most by not interfering," declared Fred, and though it didn't altogether suit me, I resolved to help that way rather than not at all.

A few days later Lord Hammerton came. He was not in any way an imposing-looking man. Indeed, he was a typical Englishman of the Lord Cholmondeley type, and drawled and used a monocle most effectively. The afternoon he came he told him all about the crystal. The talk turned to detective work and detective instinct. Lord Hammerton opined in his slow languid drawl that the true detective mind was not dependent upon instinct, but was a nicely adjusted mentality that was quick to see the cause back of an effect.

Herbert Gay said that while this doubtless was so, yet it was an even chance whether the cause so skilfully deduced was the true one.

"Quite so," agreed Lord Hammerton amiably, "and that is why the detective in real life fails so often. He deduces properly the logical facts from the evidence before him; but real life and real events often are so illogical that his deductions, though true theoretically, are false from mere force of circumstances."

"And that is why," I said, "detectives in story-books always deduce rightly, because the obliging author makes the literal facts coincide with the theoretical ones."

Lord Hammerton put up his monocle and favored me with a truly British stare. "It is unusual," he remarked slowly, "to find such a clear comprehension of this subject in a feminine mind."

They all laughed at this; but I went on: "It is easy enough to make the spectacular detective of fiction show marvelous penetration and logical deduction when the antecedent circumstances are arranged carefully to prove it all; but place even Sherlock Holmes face to face with a total stranger, and I, for one, don't believe that he could tell anything definite about him."

"Oh, come now! I can't agree to that," said Lord Hammerton, more interestedly than he had spoken before. "I believe there is much in the detective instinct besides the exotic and the artificial. There is a substantial basis of divination built on minute observation, and which I have picked up in some measure myself."

"Let us test that statement," cried Herbert Gay. "Here comes Mr. Wayne, Harold's tutor. Lord Hammerton never has seen him, and before Wayne even speaks let Lord Hammerton tell us some detail, which he divines by observation."

All agreed to this, and a few minutes later Mr. Wayne came up. We laughingly explained the situation to him and asked him to have himself deduced.

Lord Hammerton looked at Arthur Wayne for a few minutes, and then said, still in his deliberate drawl: "You have lived in Japan for the past seven years, in Government service in the interior, and only recently have returned."

A sudden silence fell upon us all—not so much because Lord Hammerton made deductions from no apparent evidence, but because we all knew Mr. Wayne had told Detective Prout that he never had been in Japan.

Fred Farland recovered himself first, and said: "Now

that you've astonished us with your results, tell us how you attained them."

"It is simple enough," said Lord Hammerton, looking at young Wayne, who had turned deathly white. "It is simple enough, sir. The breast-pocket on the outside of your coat is on the right-hand side. Now it never is put there. Your coat is a good one—Poole, or some London tailor of that class. He never made a coat with an outer breast-pocket on the right side. You have had the coat turned—thus the original left-hand pocket appears now on the right side.

"Looking at you, I see that you have not the constitution which could recover from an acute attack of poverty. If you had it turned from want, you would not have your present effect of comfortable circumstances. Now, you must have had it turned because you were in a country where tailoring is not frequent, but sewing and delicate manipulation easy to find. India? You are not bronzed. China? The same. Japan? Probable; but not treaty ports—there are plenty of tailors there. Hence, the interior of Japan.

"Long residence, to make it incumbent on you to get the coat turned, means Government service, because unattached foreigners are allowed only as tourists. Then the cut of the coat is not so very old, and as contracts run seven or fourteen years with the Japanese, I repeat that you probably resided seven years in the interior of Japan, possibly as an irrigation engineer."

I felt sorry then for poor Mr. Wayne. Lord Hammerton's deductions were absolutely true, and coming upon the young man so suddenly he made no attempt to refute them.

And so as he had been so long in Japan, and must have been familiar with rock crystals for years, Fred questioned him sternly in reference to his false statements.

Then he broke down completely and confessed that he had taken Christabel's crystal because it had fascinated him.

He declared that he had a morbid craving for crystals;

that he had crept down to the present-room late that night, merely to look at the wonderful, beautiful ball; that it had so possessed him that he carried it to his room to gaze at for awhile, intending to return with it after an hour or so. When he returned he saw Fred Farland, and dared not carry out his plan.

"And the footprints?" I asked eagerly.

"I made them myself," he explained with a dogged shamefacedness. "I did have a moment of temptation to keep the crystal, and so tried to make you think that a burglar had taken it; but the purity and beauty of the ball itself so reproached me that I tried to return it. I didn't do so then, and since—"

"Since?" urged Fred, not unkindly.

"Well, I've been torn between fear and the desire to keep the ball. You will find it in my trunk. Here is the key."

There was a certain dignity about the young man that made him seem unlike a criminal, or even a wrong-doer.

As for me, I entirely appreciated the fact that he was hypnotized by the crystal and in a way was not responsible. I don't believe that man would steal anything else in the world.

Somehow the others agreed with me, and as they had recovered the ball, they took no steps to prosecute Mr. Wayne.

He went away at once, still in that dazed, uncertain condition. We never saw him again; but I hope for his own sake that he never was subjected to such a temptation.

Just before he left, I said to him out of sheer curiosity: "Please explain one point, Mr. Wayne. Since you opened and closed that window purposely to mislead us, since you made those footprints in the flower-bed for the same reason, and since to do it you must have gone out and then come back, why were the outgoing footprints made over the incoming ones?"

"I walked backward on purpose," said Mr. Wayne simply.